





G.B. Allan -

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AUNT JANE AND UNCLE JAMES.



# AUNT JANE AND UNCLE JAMES

By  
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"Three Girls and a Hermit," etc.

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# AUNT JANE AND UNCLE JAMES

## CHAPTER I

### TELLING OF A SUMMER'S TRIP AND A MEETING

"And shake us with the vision that's gone by."—*Byron*.

SUNSHINE, the sunshine of the Channel Islands, glowed softly, thrusting bright fingers through the open windows of the chief hotel at St. Petersport. With it came the clean breath of the salt-laden, silky air, scent of carnations strong upon it. There were beds of them in the hotel garden; crimson and pale pink, drenching the world with their sweet presence. Ivy-leaf geraniums, great climbing masses, nodded rosy tassels about the woodwork of the windows. Far down, seen across the house-roofs, the sea glittered greenly out to where Herm lay slug-like across the waters, and little Sark reared her tiny rock-girdled crest.

A black patch of people upon the pier marked the crowd waiting for the English-bound steamer.

The beauty of the Channel Islands, the wealth of flowers, the keen softness of the air, might have lulled all hearts to peace. Shelia Rivers, breakfasting upon a medley of orthodox matters flanked by Guernsey grapes, said so rapturously, and then inclined her ears to listen to an altercation at the next table, where a thin lady of uncertain years and almost certain maidenhood wrestled with Francis, the waiter, concerning a reduction on the printed price of breakfast.

" Plain breakfast with eggs. If I do not take eggs I consider you should allow——"

Shelia inclined her fair-skinned face, to hide a wide smile. Francis, the waiter, looked worried but obdurate. The subject had no precedent. The eggs were laid and therefore to be eaten. He considered, with some peevishness, that the matter was closed, and proceeded to drift away rapidly. But he reckoned without his employer's guest. In thin, decisive tones the value of each egg and the gain to the hotel in its not being eaten was laid clearly before him, while Francis, a much-required man, was obliged to remain and incline a furious ear.

" Norman, it's delicious. But on such a morning ! How can she ? " said Shelia, eating purple grapes hungrily.

Six years had passed since Norman Rivers, better known as the Boy, had gone to Cahervally and married there. Six years which had passed and seemingly left him untouched by ageing fingers. The same air of youth and irresponsibility marked the quiet shrewdness of his nature ; the fact of his having passed thirty seemed scarcely credible, and the possession of a sturdy five-year-old boy, now probably getting into mischief in Ireland, appeared an incredible accident. Neither had Shelia, his wife, who had once proposed for him, changed. Tall and spare ; the loose, well-made tweed she wore might have been cut from the same piece as that the Boy had first seen her in, and, despite fashion, a light white collar spanned her neck. The hotel was very full ; ere the argument of the eggs had waned to an end, a pursy little man of uncertain middle age was ushered to the table occupied by the economical spinster. Having glared at each other with true British unfriendliness, the lady moved the



marmalade to screen her, laid a copy of the *Sunday Observer* across it, and suddenly ordered boiled eggs in the tone of one who leads a forlorn hope.

The little man leant back in his chair eyeing the newspaper guard comically. He was an airy little person with a smooth, rosy face, a weak-lipped mouth, and eyes of blue which would have been ingenuous if they could have looked you in the face. His hair, whose glossiness whispered of the dye pot, was wisped across a thinning parting; as he scanned the bill of fare, he picked a pink carnation from the vase upon the table, and pinned it with elaborate care into his buttonhole.

"A glorious morning," he said, and his smooth, round voice matched his face. "When could England give us this?"

Francis, who was worn by argument, could not say.

The little man put down the printed card with some contempt. It would appear he had ordered his breakfast, and Francis, now blandly respectful, started to get it.

It appeared with the boiled eggs, and the *Sunday Observer* fell limply from the marmalade pot that the maiden lady might observe it.

Claret, forced grapes, peaches—a cold chicken, and a Guernsey snipe-fish, facing the boiled eggs, which were broken and left ostentatiously—and the marmalade and toast.

A conversational little man (he carved chicken delicately), he observed to his companion that the English did not know how to breakfast.

The immediate replacement of the *Sunday Observer* chilled him to silence.

"What extraordinary people there are in the world." Shelia escaped to the glow of the sunshine by the carnation beds. "And—I seem to know the old cat's

face," she went on thoughtfully; "I can't think where I've seen her, but I'm sure it was somewhere."

Norman politely thought it possible. The worst of the inclusive world was that people would sit opposite to one at times in railway carriages and elsewhere. He said that he also felt that he had seen the little man.

"Not that kind of know," said Shelia, ignoring the sarcasm. "I feel I have sat at breakfast and heard her argue. It's a cloud-dream from childhood. And I'll wager even now that she is richer than the sly-faced little man who is courting dyspepsia."

Shelia peered into the breakfast-room, with its clatter of china and rattle of knives and forks and dull odour of hot bacon warring with the scent of flowers.

"They interest me," she said thoughtfully. "I cannot tell you why, but I think we shall meet those two people again."

A prophetic instinct, which was to be realized with sadness. Below them the little town hummed and woke, carts laden with flowers and fruit rumbled to the freight steamers, the fruitful little island sending her harvest to London. There were flowers everywhere, luxuriance such as England never sees, air such as Guernsey alone knows.

They strolled down to the market, ablaze with bundles of flowers, pink geraniums, bundles of carnations, dewy rosebuds. Tongues wagged fast in the cool, dim building, clatter of patois as the country people bought and sold, brown-faced, keen-eyed women bargaining over bushels of eggs, or pounds of the golden-hued Guernsey butter and bowls of curds; talking, next moment, quick English to the tourists or townspeople as they came to buy. There was everything in this little market-place. Here a vegetable stall



with bunches of soup-flavouring all tied together ; with fat peas and beans, and huge pumpkins from which Cinderella might have fashioned her coach. Meat, fish, fruit, flowers, eggs, milk, butter, and the thrifty Guernsey housewives with the long-shaped market baskets on their arms going from stall to stall for their day's marketing. Baskets of mulberries, bowls of raspberries ; here a stall with great crayfish, pale pinky red, flanked by crabs and lobsters, and the long snipe-fish with their green backbones. The clean, fresh scent of flowers bore down all others.

"Fancy this place in Ireland"—Shelia stopped to buy a bunch of crimson clove carnations—"with all the people clamouring about and dirty places everywhere, and Hannah Anne declaring that God Almighty himself wouldn't pay that price for butter, no matter how yally it was." Shelia laughed as they went out. Rows of shops faced the market-place, where one could buy more expensive fruit and flowers. Purple grapes, nectarines, and pink-cheeked peaches. Asparagus ran riot there in the season.

They walked up the High Street, with its glimpses of green water seen through narrow, stone-stepped alleys ; but here the old-world flavour died, and the shops were English in their trimness and new wares.

Shelia bought occasionally. One really felt rich when twenty-four francs were returned for an English pound.

Here they came across the stout man from the hotel airily pricing old china, and later on the grey-haired economist, who was suffering severe annoyance because a franc, which she termed a Guernsey shilling, did not represent twelve pence—they left a worried shopman arguing the point, and provided with sandwiches and fruit started for the cliffs.

A jewel set in a jewelled sea, so the little island—though marred by the great glass houses which flash back the sun, until the whole land seems a twinkle in the sunlight—might truthfully be called.

Emerald-green and indigo and cobalt, the sea sucks, softly cream-edged at the jagged rocks, which saw-toothed and cruel run so far out from land. When the rapid tide sinks, one cannot wonder why the steamers come warily, seeking the narrow channel of safety.

A sea of swift currents against which a man can scarcely pull, so that strangers going out alone have found themselves off rocky, desolate Alderney, or tugged into the big Sark harbour. A sea which can rise high, though never to the great thundering rollers of the west coast in Ireland, but a cruel, quick-flowing thing, racing in on a flood tide faster than our tides ever run.

Shelia and Norman walked fast past the barracks, high up on the hill, past cottages, all swathed in masses of pink and green and cream, and on to the cliffs. The tourists were thick upon the shore of Fermaine Bay, an arc of golden sand awash with clear green waters; little wavelets nosing on the shore—a shore spoilt by tea-houses and bathing-boxes and trippers and empty paper bags. They went down the Water Lane to Moulin Huet, which your Guernsey man calls Moulin Wett, past the little fern-edged streamlet, out from the shade into the glow of the sunshine and the sparkle and colour of the lovely bay.

But Shelia would have none of it. If Fermaine had been full this was fuller. Brakes emptied cart-loads at the head of the lane; the English tripper at his worst held high revel on rock and shingle; the tea-houses were already preparing for the jam teas of the afternoon.

But to scramble round the high cliff on to Saints Bay

was a joy. The land seemed to shimmer in the sunshine. The cliffs themselves were carpeted with flowers ; the salt air drifted from the open sea ; green and translucent blue the water crept in below them, deep indigo in its shadows, emerald in its lights. It was clear, too clear for fine weather. The glass houses on distant Jersey flashed in the sunshine. France itself rose dimly ; clouds, cliffs on the horizon.

Above Petit Bot they sat and ate their luncheon. Alone, with the wonderful air soft in their faces.

"Does it make you discontented with Ireland, Norman ?" Shelia drew a deep breath of sheer delight. "With the eternal greyness and the dim purple of the distances there."

"You'd have to ride a good glass-house jumper here," said Norman, with unpoetic thoughtfulness. "A good hill-climber, too," he added. "What's the use of a place you can't hunt in ?"

Shelia said sharply that he had no soul, but . . . she supposed one would get very tired of it.

"If you're thinking of settling here for economy—don't," said her husband severely. "They tell me it rains all winter. Think of a dripping day and a good sea-fog with all the grey water you couldn't see whimpering down there, and a screaming scent across the grass at home, and that boy Desmond getting the croup from the dampness. No ; if we want to economize and can't get paid" (he alluded gloomily to the difficulties of the Irish question and other things), "we'll do it at home—on horseback."

Shelia smiled and ate grapes. The picture of the island in a fog had checked her desire to live there. There was no immediate need for economy, or such dire remedies as Norman suggested, but the White

House at Dunmore was no longer the home of the rich. In time, at the pleasure of the slow movements of the Commissioners, things would to a certain extent right themselves, but there were other difficulties—American investments which would not pay and could not be sold, a lost deed ; and surrounded by the misfortunes which always come in battalions, there was a pinch of possible poverty, none too nebulous, at Dunmore.

“ This trip is not economy,” said Shelia suddenly.

“ You wanted change, and it merely represents Chaffinch,” said Norman stoutly. “ Also, it shall represent every penny of him, and we’ll know no economy while we are away.”

But Shelia, knowing this reckless disbursement of Chaffinch’s price would mean a horse less for the following winter, sighed over her last grape.

When Norman Rivers had married the heiress of Dunmore, a yearly income had flown in which excluded the wolf, poverty, and left the sleek cat, riches, purring on the hearthrug. But strange things occur in real life.

Years before, Shelia’s grandfather, a stern and somewhat proud old man, had possessed two sons—the younger, Shelia’s father, a rollicking sportsman of the old school with a proper pride in his name ; the elder given to hanging about the farm-houses, playing cards in the evenings with the sons of the house, and caring little for hunting or shooting. The outcome of these tastes was a violent flirtation with a pretty cook, already a widow with two daughters, who, proving cleverer than the heir to the house of Maguire, entrapped him into a marriage. When Tom Maguire wrote to tell of his wedding, his father took it quietly, yet swearing that no former cook should reign in his old home.

So with the full consent of his elder son, for whom he made due provision, he drew up a deed, breaking the entail and handing over the property to Frank, his second boy. Tom had left the county, to die when still a young man, and his widow returned with a young son, taking a little cottage, where with some remnant of the money given to her husband she lived and grumbled at her wrongs.

When, a year before, Shelia had sold her property to the tenants, papers had to be gone through, and this particular deed concerning half Shelia's wealth was missing. The old lawyer who had known of it was dead; his son had trusted to his father's statements and not gone through all the Maguire papers at his death. So the piece of precious parchment being missing, the hue and cry and search for it brought the heir, who, failing this deed, had a right to claim the property upon them. Shelia could still keep Dunmore, but more than half her income would go.

Patrick Maguire was an idle youth, with long, lean limbs, clad in over-loud checks, and a collection of cur dogs always trailing at his heels. He lived in a tumble-down house on the Caragh hills, on an uncertain income spun out by a ready facility in selling unsound horses, and for years he had bitterly resented his cousin Shelia's wealth and superior manner.

" 'Mornin', Pat,' same as you would to a groom," he growled. " An' every one knowing if I had my rights I should be owner of Dunmore now; my father being older than hers." Pat always omitted at this point to recount the true history of his father's unwise mating with a pretty cook, and his grandfather's consequent decision that none of Mary Cassidy's stock should reign in the old house, the outcome being the



drawing, with full consent of Pat's father, of the deed which excluded him.

Master Pat, who, as the people said, "favoured the Cassidys," had had the bitterness of his wrongs dinned into him from earliest childhood. His mother, who lost her looks and figure with the swiftness of her race, taught him almost before his prayers to hate his cousin Shelia. Scant wonder then that he pounced for what he termed his rights, and having engaged James Feness, a lawyer whose sharp tongue had won many shady cases, he appeared to carry all before him. If a certain reasonable time must be given for the production of the deed, he found he could debar Shelia from using any of the money arising from the debatable land. So poverty really poked his lean nose through the doorway at Dunmore, and Pat Maguire swaggered about the country in new tweeds, enlarging on the justice of God. Mary, his mother, now very fat and old, called it a judgment upon upstarts, and ordered largely on credit in Cahervally on the strength of what she called their uprise.

"We'll not stay in that rotten cottage now," said Mrs. Tom Maguire, as, having purchased a gaudy piece of yellow fur for her neck at one counter, she was languidly trying on gloves and talking to the shopman at another. "It's Dunmore itself we'll be having when young Mrs. Rivers finds she can't live there. Or maybe we'll take Granagh Castle when Macnamara leaves it. Thank you, Mr. Halnan, I'll have two pairs; charge them with furry boa and send up to Green's stables before five, if you please."

New gloves and furry boas were small items in the wave of extravagance. Pat purchased a new side-car and a grey horse to draw it, though he had to pay

for the latter; the Cahervally shopmen, full of the uprise, were only too eager to supply.

"And isn't it misfortunate for Mrs. Rivers now," said Mr. Halnan, as he endeavoured to tempt his fat customer with a magenta blouse, which clung closely to a skimpy wooden model and which would obviously not have cleared Maguire's ribs.

Mrs. Maguire, shaking her head at the blouse, observed darkly that it was a judgment. She said she had no use for those delicate shades and waddled off, an uplifted and happy woman, to invest in a leg of pork and a round of beef and some mutton at the butcher's, and to tell him as he further tempted her that there'd be enough to eat in her house for the future.

"Father Hannan will be in for a bit of dinner," announced Mrs. Tom, stepping into the shade; "an' we'll have the pork an' a turkey an' the beef, if they're hungry. I tell you I can spend what I like now, Misther Casey."

Casey, the butcher, charged it up so as to allow for a delay in payment, but he shook his head as he did so. The matter did not seem to him to be altogether safe.

While Mrs. Tom and Pat Maguire walked in blissful anticipation through Cahervally, Shelia and her husband sat upon the cliffs above Petit Bot watching the changeful sea. Emerald-green, flowing to streaks of milky white, deepening to indigo in the shadows, paling to diamond-flecked, blue wavelets where wind and sun caught it. Down in the bay the yellow arc of sand was narrowing as the swift tide rushed in.

"I tell you what"—Shelia flung a pebble down the grassy cliff—"we shall have to keep a hunting hotel, Norman, and I must ride four-year-olds and jump on the hounds to attract attention."

"Or find rich relations," said Norman suddenly.

"My Uncle James," he went on dubiously.

"My Aunt Jane," said Shelia; "she's in two mines or something."

Norman's observation that Aunt Jane might come up blind like the pit ponies was received with a chilling silence, for Shelia was thinking deeply, and had no mind for wit.

"If they came to stay they might pay, and then leave us fortunes," said Norman cheerfully. "Why can't we find 'em? Aunt Jane, so far as I remember you telling me, was cross as—as—Dayly's black colt."

"She was," said his wife. "She came to stay once and it rained all the time, and the two servants gave warning, and we all wanted to be Mohammedans because Christianity was so trying."

"Uncle James," said Norman, "was the kind of man who took everyone's pet arm-chair, and suggested the day before what he wanted for luncheon. He stayed at my aunt's once. 'Nothing solid or expensive for me, Alice. Just a sweetbread and a soufflet and an omelette and something in aspic. I am a simple man.' And Aunt Alice, who had a sense of humour, gave him pea soup, boiled beef and onions, and suet pudding. He left next day. But I think he's got heaps of money."

"Well, I wish we could find him," said Shelia; "take them as paying guests and get them to make their wills. Come, let's walk on."

They skirted the bay slowly and struck across to Petit Bot—Saints Bay had been deserted, for the way down to it is long and steep, but here in the tiny shingly hollow, with the sea mouthing below a jutting hill, the trippers swarmed and shrieked. Brakes from St. Petersport continually put down a merry load, others



waited to take those who had looked and dreamt they had seen Guernsey. Further on was the Gouffre, a dark chasm running down to the sea, a fine sea here held back by jagged rocks, and spuming and foaming against the barrier. A little hotel clung to the bare hillside, and the bright-hued clothes of the tourists made light-coloured dots against the dark background.

They walked back inland, along little twisting lanes leading nowhere and turning again into others, tree-fringed and lovely, the heart of the little isle where it is not marred by great glass houses. There were woods here and tiny glens and rushing, merry streams, flowing down rocky channels and net-chained up to make water-cress beds. Here and there a house, and the flash of a long greenhouse, but otherwise peace. They met a peasant, too, a wrinkled old man who shook his head when asked the way with a smiling "*pas anglais*," and when interrogated in French broke into a bewildering patois which made Shelia hot and helpless, before, from gestures more than words, she gathered that they were to "*tournez à drat*"—it sounds like that—before they could find the broad road to the town. The parsimonious old lady was having tea when they got in, a frugal meal of bread and butter, and near her the stout little gentleman was eating grapes and peaches with studied enjoyment.

Twilight, flower-scented and peaceful, was an hour to be enjoyed. The salt fresh air from the sea mingled with the clove-sweet smell of carnations; the peaceful fragrance of mignonette and roses. A *devoniensis* flung like foam against the garden wall; flowers grew as native things and not pampered as coaxed guests.

Even Shelia could sit still and enjoy it without undue desire to be up and moving.

It rained next morning, a steady, drenching down-pour ; the sea lay flat and dull, all its gay colours washed to grey neutrality ; there was no walking along the cliffs, nothing to do but sit still, or put on a waterproof and get wet on streaming roads.

The little old maid, judging by her conversation with the waiter, who attended her with a species of annoyed fascination, seemed to think it an imposition on the part of the management. A tourist having paid for so much fine weather and sight-seeing, some arrangement should be made to see that he got it. She said the whole thing was shockingly looked after, and sat turning over the same Sunday newspaper with a nerve-rendering rustle.

But at two the clouds rolled up as a curtain, back to the dim horizon, the sea was sparkling blue, the hot sun beat on the steaming earth, dried the battered flower-heads until the garden was a drench of perfume.

Shelia would go to Cobo, to see the flat side of the island, and being economically inclined took the bus which starts from the market-place. They sat in front, and fate ordained that the two fellow-guests from the hotel should sit close behind them. There was nothing interesting to see as the horses climbed the steep hill and then rattled downwards through rows of neat houses which, save for the wealth of flowers about them, might have belonged to Manchester. Past the rows of houses one came to the land of glass. Huge structures, low and long, monster things undreamt of here, with plots of chrysanthemums and carnations and tomatoes, planted in patches, as if, Norman remarked unromantically, they had been potatoes or cabbages.

Finding nothing to look at, they began to talk of

their troubles, facing the horrible problem of retrenchment, if the missing deed remained unfound.

"Oh, it will have to be the paying guests," said Shelia dolefully. "Dunmore is so big"—the thin woman behind her sat suddenly straighter—"one must do something."

"Or find our rich relations," laughed Norman. "My uncle, James Rivers, of nowhere."

The fat man turned a pretty pink and also sat up.

"If they'd come over and make wills for us," went on Norman, with some gloom, "well, it would be something to live on in futurity, anyhow. Sure to kill 'em off before that boy goes to school. I know Uncle James was full of money—must have been to talk as he did—swaggering old ass."

The old gentleman grew pinker.

"And old Aunt Jane's tin mines—or were they copper or gold?" said Shelia. "All I remember about her was that she was thin and vinegary, and nearly drove father mad—I was a tiny thing—and that Mary, the housemaid, gave notice because she said the lady did nothin' but tell her she was a poor misguided papist. Awful old thing."

The thin lady turned a subdued magenta and breathed sharply.

"She had me up, I remember," said Shelia, "to repeat the catechism. I was so frightened, the only bit of prayer book I could remember was, 'Cursed be he who removeth his neighbour's landmark.' I'd been to church on Ash Wednesday, and when Aunt Jane said it wasn't the catechism, and asked if I knew what it meant, I said I supposed it was written for the people who knocked down walls out hunting. Dear old Moore says she bolted, and that Aunt Jane slapped me and

ordered me to learn six collects. Father was at the door and roared with laughter, but he was cross, too, for the old thing went away next day."

"I think after all it would be better to be poor," said Norman thoughtfully; "she might slap me."

"I am quite sure of it," said Shelia cheerfully. "After all, we shall never starve, once the Commissioners pay."

But close behind them two active and far seeing minds had almost simultaneously made the same plan. Fate, a strange jade, had ordered that the forgotten aunt and uncle should travel to Cobo with them and hear their outspoken remarks. Fate ordained also that the idea of a winter spent at Dunmore was a suitable plan to the unrecognized relatives.

"Think of having an old cat about the house, even if she did die some day," said Norman.

"And a fat thing ordering soufflets," laughed Shelia as they got out, without noticing the absorbed faces of the two near them. Miss Jane Brown—in fact—she had been half-sister to Shelia's mother—remained so long that she had to be roused, and then merely wandered to the sea, where she sat wrapped in thought. A meagre, thin figure in alpaca coat and skirt and blue veiled hat.

The flat coast stretched for miles, reaches of yellow sand and honeycomb rock now covered by sunlit waters. Shelia had no desire to stay with the gathering crowd, so they walked away to Vazon, a great bay steeped in legend. Once, they say, a forest—you may see the tree stumps still—and then submerged. And here old story holds it the fairy men landed thousands of years before, and drove the mortals back across the island until they killed the last of the men in the Rue Rouge and kept the Guernsey maidens for their wives. Here,

too, was the kakero, the roofless hut where witches held their sabbaths and worked their spells. Here, too, the Guernsey maid is supposed to have met the man who coaxed her to go to his kingdom. And how her mother dreamt, and coming to the shore found the Guernsey lily, a flower lovely, but scentless, sent in her daughter's place.

Shelia had studied it all before she came, and dreamt of the quaint story now, looking out across the wide bay.

"One can almost believe it," she said dreamily. "There is something uncanny, some spell of witchcraft or fairy over it all. Can't you see it, Norman, the little man in green and the dazzled peasant child, and the old mother searching on the sands for her afterwards?"

Norman said he could not. A desire for tea was prosaically upon him.

"I'd rather see bread and jam," he observed, with husband-like brutality. "And, of course, it's all Bluebeard and Cinderella and white mice and pumpkins. Come along."

"But one's never seen Bluebeard's Castle or Cinderella's cottage," said Shelia, still thoughtful. "Here, there's the place itself where the seaman rose."

"Puffy old seal who ate her, I expect," said Norman, with a cheery disregard for natural history. "They made a story out of that."

"They might easily," said Shelia, with asperity, feeling she must dream fairy tales alone.

"The queer old image is there still, and the tide will catch her," said Norman suddenly.

Miss Jane Brown had not left the rock she had perched on. She was so wrapped in thought that the sea had crept upon her, and they peered over the sea-wall just in time to see a boisterous Channel wave smack her hard



in the face and send her shrieking shorewards with petticoats held very high as she scudded across the yielding sands.

"We'll go home in a few days. I'm quite strong now," said Shelia, over her fourth slice of bread and jam.

"And get the horses fit," said Norman happily; "even if Pat Maguire does steal your money—we've oats for two years in the lofts."

## CHAPTER II

### OF TWO LETTERS AND AN AFTERNOON CALL

SHELIA, faintly peevish, wished there were no steamers to carry letters across the land. Upon her husband thoughtfully suggesting that the steamers only carried His Majesty's mails across the sea, she sniffed, and handed him some correspondence across a vase of fresh pink carnations.

Close by them sat the little man, thoughtfully lingering over grapes and peaches, the tail of his clear blue eye ever upon the two. Also close by, surrounded by the unimpeachable morality of toast, boiled eggs, and marmalade, was the sour spinster, and she too watched the Rivers closely, her grey and fish-like orbs full of close speculation.

"It's all going as wrong as—ever it can," Shelia lowered her voice and bent her sleek, fair head closer to her husband's. "See, that's from Nancy Slade. Pat Maguire is positively rampant from anticipated triumph. He has taken to driving a tandem and upset himself twice."

Here Norman grew thoughtful and wished to know what would happen if Pat was killed.

"As if any wall or road would smash his head," said Shelia contemptuously. "Read on. His appalling mother, she says, looks upon the money as her own, and oh, Norman, it's too horrible—they are taking Clonmony from the Reidys, a house which will actually be upon our own property—upon the land we shall lose if this deed never turns up. It's all too horrible, and I shall never be able to bear it," said Shelia, a shiver of tears in her usually level voice.

"The Reidys were bad enough, but Pat and his mother, probably her terrific nieces, all by my very gates. I must go home," cried Shelia. "See if nothing can be done."

Norman shook his head a little dolefully. When for six years one has lived in the land of promise it is hard to contemplate a return journey to the pinching worries of the grey prison-house of poverty. He had hunted with the luxurious ease of riches; two horses out every day, no carping anxiety if one hunter was laid by, because there was always a spare one to take its place. He made a laudable trade in training young horses, and, because there was never any immediate necessity for their being a financial success, they generally proved themselves so; the throwing out of curbs and spavins and development of whistling, which are the poor horse dealer's nightmares, absenting themselves from the rich man's property. They had travelled, motored, spent recklessly and happily, and now without warning the grim goddess Misfortune suddenly rang the front-door bell, handed her bag to the butler, and announced that she had come to stay for some time.

"Even if," said Norman, eating grapes, "I had not sunk my little pence in America." He read the letter as mournfully as it was possible for him to do anything.

"I observe," he said, "that that boy Desmond spends his days with Hannah Anne, and his nurse spends her time in washing him. 'Yesterday,'" he read, "'he took Hannah's twins to the pond and tried to teach one to swim; as it was only twenty months old, the chance arrival of Malone, the gardener, was all that saved it from drowning. Hannah Anne said the other'd have cot a could in the cradle without it, but otherwise appeared to be undisturbed.'"

Norman laid down the letter and grinned; then he opened one of his own letters, addressed in strange characters to "Mr. Norman Rivers, Esquire, the House Hotel, Guernsey, the Channel," and read it thoughtfully.

Mickey, one time poacher and now gamekeeper, had much to say upon the subject of Shelia's woes.

"Them Maguires," he wrote in painful penmanship. "'were puffed up with pride. An' as old Mrs. Reidy was all for dyin' at home, they had Clonmony got from them. Some kind ov a fool had advanced Pat Maguire money, an' he had three racehorses bought, no less, and said he'd lift every Hunt Cup in the spring. An' I'm afeared of him an' the rabbits," wrote Mickey; "for I'm tould he's handy as a weasel up in his own parts—he an' an ould rapscallion called Andy, a chap with one eye, that he has along with them. An' Masther Desmond, God bless him, was near to dhrownin' one of Hannah's twins, gaspin' blue it was whin Malone raked it out—but indeed Hannah a hardly miss it. An' the roan colt is lame still, an' the grey mare not too sound. Peter was for firin' one and blishterin' the other. An' God bring ye home safe," concluded Mickey, "over the say I'd like to sink some in.

"Your obedient

"MICKEY."



"Another year," said Norman, sighing, "both those horses would have kept absolutely sound and well, and brought in three hundred pounds."

He rose, almost knocking against the urbane old gentleman who was studying the landscape with a very absorbed expression. A smudge of smoke over the quiet sea seemed to give him much cause for thought. Yet the expression in his eyes as he accepted Norman's apology was that of one who had never known guile.

Francis told them the airy little person was a Mr. James, of London. "Rich gentleman, very liberal, special menu each day and no questions as to price," said Francis, with the joy of the waiter in him who spends. "Traps everywhere; yesterday, in fact, was the first day he didn't have one. Best bedroom in the hotel."

When Shelia and Norman went to the post office on the side of the hill, they encountered the little old gentleman posting a large parcel to England, and when Norman went again to send a telegram, he found him posting another, and wondered idly at so luxurious a little person twice carrying his own goods upon a hot and dusty day.

They left next morning, saying farewell to the little island with a genuine regret, steaming out upon a restless, heaving sea, all green and opal and sparkling blue. The steamer was crowded, and upon the quay, cool in grey flannels, an overcoat upon his arm, strolled Mr. James, the luxurious, his blue eyes full of childish interest. They had heard him tell Francis how he expected a friend from Jersey, and he was apparently watching for him now. Then he came on board slowly, questioning some of the officials—and Norman, who was always oppressed by the idea that he knew the little man, lost sight of him.

They steamed out past the grim, saw-toothed rocks, past little Herm, and away for the dangerous Casquets, soon visible in the clear light. Now Alderney rose dimly, desolate little rock of the ocean, hemmed about by its maze of currents and tides.

As the swell by the Casquets lifted the steamer, painting green tinges upon the passengers' faces, Shelia, loving the roll and dip, was amazed to see Mr. James on board. He sat upon a deck-chair, frankly green and wretched, and beside him, as if fate must bring them together, was Miss Jane Brown, rigidly unhappy, leaden-cheeked, as the little steamer dipped and rose. The treacherous Channel chose to grow rougher; its green waves emerald clear in the sunshine, the screw track snow as it poured away; but the glorious combination of colour had power to toss the Jersey packet unmercifully, with that combination of roll and dip which is fatal to the indifferent sailor.

Shelia said indignantly that it was brutal of the sea to behave so, and yet with the heartlessness of the unmoved upon the ocean found space for a chuckle. For, growing limper and limper, the erstwhile enemies of the hotel had swayed together, until shoulder rested against shoulder, and the green, childlike old face was almost touching the leaden-hued, rigid misery of the other's.

"And you know"—Norman ate grapes heartlessly—"no one knew the old fellow meant to leave. I wrong no man, but unless I am greatly mistaken, his wardrobe travelled by parcel post last night, and an empty brown portmanteau is all the return the hotel will see for the hothouse fruit and extra food."

At this point misery thawed the memory of antagonism. Mr. James, of London, finding a bottle of

lavender water feebly thrust near his fingers, as feebly grasped and sniffed it, though the effort appeared to be a perilous one, and the green hue on his face deepened.

But the white cliffs of the little storm-washed isle, which will not read the word defeat, rose and grew nearer; the tumble of green water was less troublous under the land's shelter, and as the steamer passed the grey sharpness of the Needles, the Solent was calm enough to charm the fears of sea-sickness to rest. Mr. James sat straighter, the expression of a faintly injured cherub began to reassert itself upon his face, and he absently deluged his pocket-handkerchief with scent and as absently placed the bottle beside him. Miss Jane Brown also woke to a brighter severity; her complexion melted from the hue of jade to that of green-tinged lead, and hailing a steward she plaintively demanded tea. Mr. James, sniffing lavender water, found voice to say that he would like some, too; on it came upon one tray, the two partaking of it together, Mr. James directing the steward to return for the money when he came for the tray. They ate slowly as they steamed between narrowing banks, until, save for the bright waters, beauty was murdered by flat shores, and Southampton harbour was plain to see. Little yachts winged by them, heeling to a merry breeze; warships, grey and chill, made smudges on the blue river; grimy tramps passed down with the tide, and the quick hammer of bells ordered a shortening of speed for the Jersey steamer. At this point Mr. James got up for a moment to fetch a coat, gallantly directing his friend of the passage to keep his seat, and then seemed to melt into the crowd and disappear.

Shelia and Norman, standing near, were audience to the heated refusal on the lady's part to pay for both

teas, and the polite insistence of the attendant that as she had ordered she must do so. The faint heaving of the ocean made search for the forgetful acquaintance impossible, and also curtailed her powers of resistance, so that she presently flung a second shilling on to the tray and denounced the company furiously. They had scarcely stopped when she began a fevered search, but in the crowd of holiday makers pouring in to the *douane* it was no easy task to pounce upon a stranger.

As Shelia and Norman were passed through, they observed the spinster's blameless luggage being searched minutely by a dapper clerk, whose suspicions had been aroused by her anxiety to pass on. As the mysteries of a frugal wardrobe were prodded and unrolled, the lady chafed like a hard-held horse, and the dapper clerk's ears had due cause to go red.

It was, of course, at this point that she caught sight of her defaulter, smilingly declaring his lack of all luggage and vanishing on to the crowded platform.

Having finally denounced the clerk as a meddlesome and brainless fool, she fled on, and her peering scurry up and down the train was almost piteous in its despairing energy.

Norman, leaning against cushions with the luxurious feeling of a man who knows he ought to have gone third, said it was better than a play.

The boat-train whirled Londonwards rapidly, and the last glimpse they got of the defrauded spinster was alighting at Basingstoke, and doing a last hurried canter down the train to see if she could recover her shillings. Mr. James they observed at Waterloo, departing smiling in a hansom.

The start from Euston next morning reminded Norman of the autumn night when he and Kane Norton

and Travers had set forth on their first journey to Cahervally ; of the piles of unneeded luggage, the heavy overpayments, the hopes and fears and anticipations as they talked of their promised land.

" And—now it's my home," said Norman, as the mail dived screeching into a sooty tunnel and all the evil foulness of the place rushed in through the open window. " Somehow I was intended to live in Ireland." The tunnel ended and they flashed into the clear softness of summer daylight. Trim fenced meadows, silver placid streams ; roadways ; nestling farm-houses. Great shorthorns were knee-deep in grass ; laden wagons toiled along the roads ; the tale of orderly work, of deep-seated prosperity, was hall-marked upon it.

" And would you give it," said Norman, " for one look at the crag country, with never a house to be seen, all the grey walls a jumble of stones across the world and foxes in the gorse ? No canals or wire to stop you there, or beastly tillage to get in your way and make you go round. Lord, you'd want a combined boat and wire-nippers under you here."

This statement having clearly shown that he was a sportsman before he was a farmer, Norman relapsed into contemplation of illustrated papers and sundry yawning wishes that they could fly back to Dunmore.

" And get the irritation of arrival over," said Shelia, " Don't you know it. ' Oh, welcome home, ma'am, you're looking grand, an' the red cow is dead, and please ma'am, Peter's here to tell ye about one of the horses. In a bad way I'm afeared it is, and here's Maggie, ma'am—terrible glad to see ye, for herself an' Maria is afther fallin' out this two weeks pasht an' neither'll sthay two minnits if you don't send away the other—an' they'd like it settled to-night.' Those," said



Shelia, "are the common joys of return. Also this time there will be endless news concerning the lawsuit, and . . . I am afraid. . . . I have never been poor. It seems a little hard that it should come upon me now."

Norman reviled all lawsuits first, and the land of the Stars and Stripes for their inconvenient slump next—his possessions were not great, but they would have been better than nothing if the depression had not reduced them to a dim and nebulous hope.

"If Travers didn't go to Norton's this winter, we might have taken his horses in," said Norman gloomily. "He pays a crowd for them at the hotel."

"Our only hope would appear to be a will in your favour, and your Uncle James timely becoming an angel," said Shelia grimly.

Norman pitied the angels, but said after all they could look out for themselves if he got the money, and the train glided into Crewe.

Dunmore, nestling among its trees, was reached early next morning, for they stopped on the way, and Shelia's warm welcome was not altogether devoid of the incidents she had suggested. Tom, his face aglow with joy, had gloomy news about the horses. Mickey forget the tale of young pheasants as he bitterly recounted what he termed Pat Maguire's "sthreakins" round the countryside. Shelia's relations had left the cottage on the hill and were installed at Clonmony, with a "sight of servants, and Mrs. Tom's two daters home from a convent—grand as brass."

Old Mr. Butler, their lawyer, came over in the afternoon, and there was no word of the hope which despite themselves they had nursed on the way back, the something which they had felt must happen to end all the bother when they saw the square old house standing

solidly in the sunshine, flowers flaring all about it on the smooth green lawn, and Desmond screaming on the doorstep.

Pat Maguire pushed his claim home; delays could not last for ever—further searching seemed useless.

“Yet there is no doubt the old man never intended any descendant of Mary Cassidy’s to live here or enjoy any money further than the sum he left them,” said Butler gravely, “and we must go on looking to the last. Your father’s brother consented to it himself, Shelia—the missing deed sets all that forth.”

So Shelia going about her home sighed. There were so many useless dependants who would suffer with her. Workpeople who did little, but whom she could not bear to send away, because they could never do anything else. Methods of farming would have to be changed; old faces she loved would live to hopeless misery in the “House” they all dreaded.

Horses, and consequently their attendants, must leave the square, sunny yard.

Shelia failed to pay her usual attention to Hannah Anne’s detailed account of who had passed in and out, and the cleverness with which Master Desmond, God help him, had apparently tried to kill several of her children. “Whin he couldn’t larn the baby to swhim, he tried to teach him to fly,” said Hannah Anne happily, “with two ould turkey’s wings tied on to his back; and ’twas a mercy the bush they got off from was a low one.”

Maria the housemaid’s tale that “St. Peter himself would find it hard to put up with the dairymaid,” was absently received, and life at Dunmore taken up again more than a little sadly.

The drowsy August heat veiled the world in its haze—trees grew green and dusty, grass brown and burnt, unwatered flowers waned and drooped. But the begonias flared gloriously, scarlet sparks on the lawns, white tobaccoes opened starry blooms drenching the air with scent, and on the hot walls pears swelled, peaches painted their downy cheeks, and plums deepened to violet and mellow gold and spotted purple-reds.

Norman, swinging into breakfast one cloudless morning, said cheerily that he was taking in all the horses, and inquired if the post had arrived. He sat down before a gigantic helping of bacon and eggs, taking up his one letter just as Shelia opened one of hers—their son, a solemn-faced young person in a high chair, chipping an egg with studious care.

Both letters were put down almost simultaneously. Shelia said “Oh!” and Norman that he was blowed, at the same moment.

“Aunt Jane!” gasped Shelia.

“Uncle James,” cried Norman.

“Wants to come here,” they said together, gazing at their letters in acute bewilderment.

Norman said Shelia meant he did, and Shelia that he should have said she did, and then Shelia passed her letter, written neatly upon Silurian note of the cheapest description, to her husband, calling him exceedingly silly, and receiving a sheet of thickest vellum, blackly scrawled upon, in reply, both exclaiming as they read on. Desmond, finding himself lost in this mental dust storm, uncapped his egg and delicately poured golden syrup into it, apparently finding the mixture to his liking.

Norman read in amazement—as in niggling, economical writing Shelia’s aunt, Jane Brown, stated



her wishes. She had given up her house, and required a change. The Irish climate had been advised by her medical attendant. Should Shelia see her way to receiving her for the winter months, she—Aunt Jane—was prepared to pay—liberally—this was underlined.

Also, she knew they were addicted to sport. It would be an amusement to her to see the hounds throw off. Norman scratched his head over that. Miss Brown then proceeded to hint darkly, but discreetly, of her relationship to Shelia, and her present indecision as to the future possessor of her small means.

"The mines," said Shelia weakly. Norman read aloud. "Oh, I suppose it's Providence."

"She means to leave you the mines," said Norman briskly.

"Yes, but she is coming to live here first," said his wife gloomily. "You don't know Aunt Jane, Norman. Still, no doubt it's Providence," and she sighed very deeply. Then she read the letter from the Boy's uncle. The characters were rounded and flowing as the easy sentences they expressed. Uncle James was also lonely. He remembered dear Norman in bygone days. Well, Uncle James, not being a miracle, grew no younger, and blood ties called him. He wanted to see Norman again. His affairs were still unsettled.

"Do you think it means mines, too?" said Norman hopefully.

He had often heard of Ireland, went on Uncle James; could Norman and his wife put up with an old buffer for a few months? there'd be a little slip of paper in return in the spring. Young people were never too well off. They were to write and say plainly if they didn't want him, but he would like to come—and idle there.

"Providence," said Norman uncertainly. "One would think they knew. Male and female—Lord! Look here, do you think we can——"

At this point the discussion was interrupted by Shelia glancing at her son and finding him immersed in a golden-tinted cobweb of syrup. What he could not eat he had distributed over himself, and the emptiness of the sugar bowl was accounted for by a pile sticking high from his teacup.

"That boy!" said Norman.

"Golden syrup and egg aufoo good," observed Master Desmond gravely.

"Washing awfoo good," said his mother severely, and a patient nurse answering a peal upon the bell, removed the culprit to be washed.

Breakfast was almost neglected by two usually hungry people, and they went into the morning-room to discuss the question with deliberation.

It was the cosy room into which Norman had burst so many years ago. The fresh chintz was the same pink shade, the old-fashioned furniture stood in the same place—the French windows were flung wide now and the scent of mignonette drifted in.

Norman lighted a pipe and sat down; his wife leant against the window. She had altered as little as the room. Fair-haired, clear-skinned, fresh as the clear morning, the story of an open-air, untroubled life written on her quietly attractive face.

"I suppose"—she fidgeted with a spray of climbing roses—"I suppose we must do it. Must entertain Providence——"

"Male and female," said Norman gloomily.

"We can't say no—now. It may mean an inheritance for that boy. Also, we can hunt more easily

if we turn ourselves into an hotel; and things are not very rosy, Norman."

Norman remarked viciously that they were almost leaden. "We shall lose a lot of money defending the action," he said cheerily, "and all the best young ones are wrong. Pat is stalking over the land with the air of a conqueror, and he is also poaching my rabbits. I met him on the road yesterday, and he was kind enough to offer me a mount, if I ran short in the winter. I thought Mickey would have shot him. His two flaunting half-sisters have come home from convents or somewhere, and I verily believe they expect you to get them into society."

"I shall call—once," said Shelia grimly.

"Therefore, if we can't see our way out, I suppose we had better accept Providence—uncle and aunt," said Norman.

"We can give them the pink room to sit in; they will fight all day," said Shelia pleasantly. "Aunt Jane will also endeavour to reform that boy."

"She will not lack occupation," said his father thoughtfully.

"She will object to everything we do, and all the servants will leave. But if we eventually possess the mines we must put up with it," said Shelia.

Mickey, the gamekeeper, appeared at the window.

"Misther Pat Maguire, yer honour," he said, "is afther breakin' the lock of the gate out of the four acres an' goin' home that way. He said it didn't matter, because there was no keys betune cousins, an' also that the four acres 'd be his own in a month or two."

Shelia, pink-cheeked, snorted furiously, directing the locking and wiring up of the gate.

"Ye'd think the wuruld an' all belonged to him now," said Mickey viciously. "With a white ridin'-trouser on him no less, and a yally sash around his middle, for all the world like a polo-playin' officer. Oh, 'twas a bitter day, ma'am, whin the likes of thim wint for another's rights. Doesn't he know in the back of his mind that the old masther niver meant Mary Cassidy's son to take the land from the genthry? An' thim half-sisthers of his that's no relation to ye callin' thimselves Miss Cassidy Maguires and givin' thimselves as much airs as the paycock here. You couldn't hear the priest sayin' mass whin they comes rustlin' in, and 'tis but an odd wind of the incense ye'd get with the grand shmells that's off thim. I tell ye, ma'am, there'll be bad days there if ye get yere rights, an' 'tis in me mind's eye that the paper's somewhere yet."

Mickey shambled away, going with the lurching trot which had carried him swiftly from bog to bog in his poaching days; old habit taking his eyes from side to side, as if he still watched for the wrathful owners who might interfere with his shooting.

"The paper's somewhere yet." Shelia shook her fair head. "If we could find that somewhere"—she looked dolefully at her writing-table—"I need not think of Aunt Jane's mines."

"Think it over," said Norman; "there's time enough."

"And I won't have those girls here," said Shelia, almost fiercely. "They are absolutely no relation—daughters of Mary Cassidy's first husband—that at least must not be. They are absolutely no relation to me."

"H'm!" said Norman doubtfully.

Yet that very morning was marked by the effusive

visit of Pat and his sisters. Mamma, cherishing rancour, stayed at home, but Shelia, coming in, found two pink chintz chairs occupied by convent-smartened, mincing Violet and Rosie, for Mary, their mother, had not spared money upon their education. Further, there was Pat himself in flannels, orange tie and boots, and an overhigh collar.

The pack of dogs straying pleasantly outside, finding the warmest lying-places in the best flower beds.

"We just ran over to see you at once," he said, looking awkwardly at Shelia's highly poised head. "Me an' the girls. No ill-will, you know, between cousins." Plainly he meant to include his half-sisters in the relationship.

A pink flag of wrath stained Shelia's smooth cheek. Good taste might have kept them away from the subject. They were so very plainly come to see how the land lay, and what spirit she would receive them in.

"We thought, indeed, when mamma lived up the mountains, to stay altogether away in Dublin with Aunt Susie," said Violet; "but now"—she paused, pleasantly—"we'll be in the swim down here, as we ought always to have been." She sniffed in sheer delight, fingering an expensive feather boa, and diffusing white rose scent.

Shelia's fair head went so high that a strained neck seemed imminent. She studied her cousin Pat with a searching scrutiny, and wondered how much relationship fostered dislike. He was a round-nosed, weak-chinned young fellow, with just enough good breeding showing through his commonness to make him aggressive. His glances at a mirror showed him to be pleasingly conscious of his fine eyes and flashy good looks. His sisters were of the same stamp, though



Rosie, the second girl, had fair hair of the same shade and fineness as Shelia's, and slender hands and feet. She was the quieter of the two; so much so that with a less brilliant assortment of finery she would have looked almost well bred.

"I'm after gettin' two grand horses for the winter," said Pat, breaking a strained silence. "I'll be out every day now."

"With a red coat on him," said Violet proudly; "an' I'll be out myself, too."

These Cassidys were absolutely impossible.

The bitter waters of affliction poured in flood tide over Shelia's soul. They—these one-time despised cousins—would be out regularly, flaunting the money which once had been hers, while she and her husband, so far as she could see, would have to be content with two days a week, and now that all the young horses had gone wrong, with only one horse apiece. These cousins, living close by, would see her newly found poverty and jeer at it. Her eyes fell upon her Aunt Jane's letter, and she drew a deep breath of determination. The sojourn of the aunt and uncle would at least mean a sufficiency of money and a probable certainty of future inheritance.

The sudden appearance at the window of a square-jawed man in flannels did not mend matters. Murrough Macnamara's visit being generally the herald of a further guest, a young woman who would not care to meet the other Maguires.

Pat at this point had spied a case of miniatures, and was racking Shelia's nerves by his thirst for knowledge of his relations.

"Who did you say now, Shelia? Lady what—Lady Anne Maguire, married to my great-grandfather?



I declare, I think I favour her about the eyes. Violet, am I like my great-grandmother ? ”

Violet sniffed a little jealously, but agreed.

“ An’ that’s my great-uncle, is it ? An’ another great-aunt. Well, it’s wonderful to see them all, for the first time,” said Pat, with some meaning ; he fingered the case curiously.

“ I believe,” said Shelia absently, forgetting that she had intended to avoid the subject—“ I believe that case of miniatures was on the library table when grandfather died. He had just hung up his own in it ; they found him with a big farm book open and his miniature in the case.” She paused, annoyed with herself.

“ And a scrawl on a scrap of paper,” put in Murrough Macnamara. “ ‘ Dying—shake——’ Poor old chap ! No one ever found out what that meant. He’d been going through his papers, as if he knew he was going to die.”

“ It’s presentiment,” said Pat gravely. “ Hadn’t Timmy Casey’s old mother up at our place the same feel the night before the fox swept her gander ? I was in there for a hand of cards, and I declare to goodness she was groaning every minute, and away three times to see if the fowl-house door was closed. An’ the third time she was so careful, she left it open herself, and, be jabers, the gander went—that was the very same.”

Its sameness having brought Mr. Macnamara’s complexion to a brickish shade as he suppressed his laughter, Pat eyed him with suspicion and left the miniatures alone. But his further tour of inspection, aided by occasional admiring rushes from his sisters, was still more nerve-racking.

A desire to see the portraits in the dining-room was not encouraged, while the too apparent hope of the

Miss Cassidys to be asked to lunch was completely ignored by a chilly young hostess. Finally, as this reached her brain, Violet rose with sudden violence and sufficient haste to upset her chair, announcing that the beef would be roasted to rags if mamma had been fool enough to wait, placing a white-gloved hand in Shelia's with a marked and openly betrayed sense of injury.

"Indeed, I'm afraid you're blaming yourself for what we can't help," she said pertly, as she rustled out.

Shelia, watching their agitated departure, hoped she had not been rude. She saw their heads were close together as they walked down the avenue, and the ring of clamorous voices could mean nothing but bitter derision.

"They—those girls mean to trade upon Pat's relationship," stormed Shelia.

Macnamara, called by his friends Mac, shook his fair head.

"Better keep them out from the first," he said, as Shelia rang the bell. "I came over, Shelia. Are you expecting any one?"

"Two extra people to lunch," said Shelia abruptly to the man. "Yes, Mac, Norman will be back, that's all."

Macnamara eyed her thoughtfully. "Then why two?" he asked, with a somewhat heavy display of guileless curiosity.

"For Nancy, of course," she said briefly. "Isn't she coming?"

Macnamara breathed heavily, murmuring vaguely that he supposed chance might bring Miss Slade to Dunmore, but, of course, he couldn't tell, and then abandoning guile, he grinned openly.

He was a slight, rather good-looking youth, with ingenuous blue eyes and a fixed habit of colouring

hotly whenever he was quite guiltless. Now, knowing himself to be discovered, he was placidly pale. Owner of some acres and a ramshackle old house, he had been brought up by a fond mother as a country gentleman who had no need to work. And so had drifted through a brief period of school life and a year or two of blissful horse-filled minority to find on his mother's death that he was far too poor to keep up or even repair his over-large house, that the grazing agitation left his land upon his hands, and it was far too impoverished to farm with much hope of profit. But being Irish and blissfully unpractical, Mac camped out in a corner of his many-roomed possession, kept as many horses as he could, saw the plaster peel and the slates lift without worrying, and drifted from year to year quite happily. Trusting to the lucky sale of a horse to tide him over the next winter; borrowing to buy another if that one went wrong; paying scraps to every one when a few pounds came to him, deeply hurt if any creditor thought of clamouring for the whole of his debt. It was doubtful if he had the faintest idea of how much he owed or how much came in to him. The true Irish trust in luck and futurity, the buoyant, unpractical hope which makes a rudderless, leaky craft sail over the roughest sea, kept him happy. There was always some wondrous colt which would make his fortune, and when that animal, growing to horsehood, proved nothing more than a good hunter, its failure was happily glozed over and another rose to take its place in a happy, unpractical mind. Two old servants, one-time nurse and gardener, slaved for him; cooking rabbits and game and fish, and slapping about the extraneous dust in the rooms he inhabited. So Murrough Macnamara had drifted, and was content to drift, without

great desire for better days, until Nemesis, clothed as Cupid, overtook him.

There were business men in Cahervally, people who actually made money for themselves, and one Carton Slade ruled factories and houses, and farmed with a strange and vigorous tidiness until his lands in sheer amazement yielded great returns. He lived at Mount Eyre, a house some miles from the town, and to him a year or so before had returned from school in Paris a grown-up and attractive daughter. The first flash from her grey eyes reft the web spun by spider never-mind about Mac's brain; not that his part would have mattered, but the rich man's daughter chose to let her fancy fall upon the incomeless Irish landowner.

A walk with her about Mount Eyre gardens sent the unprofitableness of his life rushing in like flood tide over Mac's hitherto sleeping soul. He saw himself as he was, with his wilderness about him. Here flowers grew in orderly deference, fearful lest a straggle or failure should mean their casting in the fire; pears and peaches and plums swelled to gigantic lusciousness; the houses were groves of shady, mysterious palms, of glorious masses of colour and scent. And at Castle Granagh Mac thought of the tangle of weeds and neglected flowers, the gooseberries peering thornily from green forests of scutch, the gnarled, cankered trees, the walks with a passage for one trodden upon their weedy surfaces. He thought of his peeling walls, his leaking roof—and returned so spurred by resolution that he set forth in the morning to mend the rotting thatch upon his cart shed, and only succeeded in falling through and making a larger hole. An hour's scramble among the garden weeds brought no better result; then long habit took him at last to the paddock, where three

long-limbed, big-boned three-year-olds set him dreaming once more.

From that day, with endless difficulties, with many quarrels and fits of raging hopelessness, Mac had adored with a steadiness which arose from the shape of his chin, and Miss Slade had encouraged him. Mac was a favourite of Shelia's. Dunmore grew to be a favourite meeting-place, so much so that the arrival of Miss Slade meant a call, absolutely unpremeditated, from Mac, and vice versa.

Shelia therefore had not been unwise when she ordered another place at table.

He searched the avenue with an expectant eye, then turned to his hostess.

"I wish to goodness one could find the thing," he said, "the deed I mean. You know, I always feel sure that it's somewhere—that the old man never lost or destroyed it. What did shake mean?"

"They put away the papers, feeling sure the deed was among them," said Shelia gloomily. "Every one thought it was there—in its big envelope. Of course, it was gross carelessness at the time, but that's no use now. Shake—I'd shake the house down to find it. And now, instead, I must see that appalling Pat spending money he was never meant to have, and I must take in uncles and aunts for a living."

"Take in what?" said Mac. And Shelia explained.

But the appearance of a young lady in a pony cart drove all interest in other things away. She was accompanied by Norman, whom she had picked up in the avenue.

Nancy Slade was a pretty, bright-eyed girl, with a sensitive mouth, brown-gold hair, and a wilfulness of manner which spoke of decision. Her greeting to Mac

was slightly chilling and almost too full of surprise. She was prepared with elaborate explanation as to a call at Shaney for some eggs, and her subsequent discovery that she must miss lunch at home, so ran in to Shelia's, and, "I hope I won't put you out," said Nancy sweetly.

"Oh, no, I expected you," said Shelia drily as the gong echoed and thundered, and she looked at Mac.

Miss Slade reddened and cast a fiery glance upon that youth, whose face was so blank of expression as to be almost rigid.

"Beef," said Mac, as he demolished a large helping, "is an excellent thing, Shelia. Old Mary says she wonders I don't be gettin' a twitch in me nose from all the rabbits I ates."

Shelia said absently that rabbits reminded her of boiled string with a strong flavour; her mind was full of her own sorrows. She might have to descend to rabbits in the future.

"Those awful people were here to-day, Norman," she burst out; "absolutely gloating—wanting to go round the house. You know, it's not a bit certain that they may not take some silver and pictures too."

"They stopped me on the road," said Norman, "and Pat said he'd give me a mount next year. Mickey said on an ass maybe—quite loud—unto the hedge—that was something."

"It's all very fine, but supposing they lose?" said Nancy.

"They can't," wailed Shelia. "We can fight and gain time, but that's all. They must win, and they know it. Oh, shake!—shake!—I'd shake old grandfather if I had him here now!"

Mac thought gravely that grandfather might be



unpleasant—at luncheon—and on his joke being received with reserve took another helping of beef instead of waiting to chuckle.

“He must have meant something,” said Nancy Slade thoughtfully. “Poor man, he must have felt his heart stopping, and tried to write, as he could not move or call. The secret of the missing deed lies behind that word.”

“They found him half across the table as if he were struggling to reach something,” said Shelia; “the gum bottle was upset over everything, and no one noticed much at the time, because the idea was that all the papers were safely in the despatch box, which was locked as if he had finished with it. Oh, it’s a wretched subject! How is the bay colt, Mac?”

Mac said the colt was top hole. A sunlit wave of enthusiasm lit up his features as he wove a silver web about the bay colt’s future. How he was certain to win a big race at Punchestown, and then be sold for unmeasured gold to race, and perhaps run in the National.

“He’s in the book, with all the coarseness of a fourteen-stone hunter,” said Mac enthusiastically; “a mouth like silk and the heart of a lion, and jumps like a deer. Oh, I’ve got the pea under the thimble this time, I think. I shall get five or six hundred for him, and that will start me properly.”

Miss Slade sighed over a meringue. She knew her father’s opinion on the subject of poor men keeping racehorses, and remarked gloomily that she believed Mr. Macnamara would make more money out of his garden.

“In which I dug up a whole plot yesterday,” said Mac indignantly; “and James Dunne says now the

plum trees I rooted round won't bear again for years. He says thim bits of weeds does no harrum to sthone-fruit roots, an' a fair share of thim keeps the frost off in winther. I've really got a corner clear now; James says its shamin' the rest with the nakedness of it. Besides, wouldn't it take a long time to make five hundred out of cabbages? Forefront is better business."

Nancy sighed again. In the past eighteen months she had seen at least three of these wondrous fancies pass to eternal failure. One proved a rogue who would not try, needing a man with a whip behind him at the start; another shut up in soft going; and the third fell and broke his back when running well in his first race. She did not possess much faith in racehorses.

Luncheon over, she and Mac strolled into the garden, where they glozed love-making over with the hot lava of sharp speeches and quarrelling, which some young people seem to think necessary, and Shelia and Norman were left alone among their flowers.

The post left early at Dunmore. Shelia looked at her untidy table unhappily.

"I—suppose—we'd better do it," she said unevenly.

"Have them both—they can quarrel all day," said Norman. "But it's hanged hard luck, Shelia, even if it is Providence."

Mac stuck his head in at the window.

"Oh, about those old people," he said. "You must take 'em; with a motor and cold weather you never know your luck—anything might kill them off."

They wrote the letters which were read with such joy in England. By Uncle James, sipping old claret purchased on credit, and by Aunt Jane frugally lunching off mild cheese and watercresses, with filtered water as a beverage.

Nancy Slade's pretty voice called just as Shelia licked the envelope with a bitter sigh.

"I must go," she said. "Father will wonder where I've been. I hope you didn't mind my turning up like this, as Mrs. Graves was out?"

"She left for Dublin last week," said Norman.

"So that was all right," said Shelia, smiling. "Don't be a goose, Nancy, and post these letters for me. Since the postman has fallen in love with Jane, he often misses the mail. He's coming now, but no idea when he'll leave."

"And those letters represent our golden dreams for the winter. Aunt Jane and Uncle James—hang them both!" said Norman.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ARRIVAL

"We fret, we fume,  
Would shift our skins,  
Would quarrel with our lot."—*Tennyson*.

AUGUST, hot-footed, had sulked away behind a thunder-storm, leaving russet-dressed September to take his place, soft-breathed; with west winds she cleared the sultry air and chilled the lengthening nights. Sheaves of ripening corn in her gentle hands, which touched the leaves so softly that death was forgotten as she painted bright hues across their now sombre greens. "Rest," she said, "it grows time." Her cool hands spoke faintly of winter, sent fox-hunters rooting in naphtha-tainted boxes to look at gay pink coats and sombre habits, and downstairs to see that their boots were not hard, and then to their writing-tables to wonder how much they

could spare for needed new clothes. It was the month for saddlers to work feverishly at saddles and straps which they might have had to mend all the summer, for the hay barns to get stuffed with sweet, fragrant hay, and for fresh boughs to get piled ready for the golden stacks of straw.

What happiness September had been wont to bring at Dunmore, when money was boundless and there were no claimant cousins living next door! How the string of youngsters, which were always far better than any which had been put in before, were criticized and schooled and worked!

Tragedy when Conners declared the bay mare to be a "lightsome kind of a grubber, and divil a haperth of good but to sell to some officer." Joy when the black colt swept over the big double without a mistake, and the vet pronounced the grey to be no whistler after all.

Shelia had her own weight-carriers, which must be perfection before she rode them; but Norman delighted in the well-trained youngsters with all their faults—those of too-eager youth. Now this year, when success with the four-year-olds would have been a distinct relief, they all seemed to go wrong. The fired roan used his hocks with a lack of freedom which promised further trouble; the grey mare, a great slashing beauty, had not been improved by her blister, showing a tendon which bowed ominously the morning after work. There were other failures. The Knight, which they had paid a large price for, whistled cheerily and unmistakably. Ladybird, a black mare, picked up a nail at exercise and lost half her hoof—and even the old horses were going lame.

Sad faces had never before come to morning stables about the roomy range of boxes, but they appeared there

now, lengthened and gloomy, as Norman and Shelia passed from cripple to cripple, and knew there was no ready money to renew the stables with.

"There was niver a misfortin came but he'd thail a dozen behind him, for all the world like a kite's sthring," said Mickey, lugubriously, as he assisted to bathe Grey Dawn's doubtful leg. Mickey, being gamekeeper, never failed to do many other things. "An' good luck the very same way. Didn't Clancy's wife lasht week lose her ould mother that was ailin' this many year, and left a hundred pound behind her, an' I declare a week wasn't out whin Clancy's own uncle was whipped with a fit and left them three cows an' a lame jinnit. There they are that proud they can hardly talk to ye now. There's a queer kind of twisht in it that God above'll do nothin' be halves."

Shelia said there appeared to be, and sighed heavily. She had meant to keep Grey Dawn for herself.

"An' thim outside," grumbled Mickey as he took away a bandage from a stable-boy and bade the offended youth to go about "his bizness." "Thim outside ridin' an' drivin' day an' night cocksure of themselves no less . . . spendin' borried money like wather. There's Miss Vi'let now in a new brown ridin'-dressh sittin' skew-ways above on the horses, signs bye—my cousin's nephew, that's helpin' there, says he has the shoulders tore out of what she rides. With all their grandther, indeed, claimin' what niver was meant to belong to thim!"

Shelia would hear of no settlement. "We'll keep them out of it to the last moment," she said; "for they were never meant to have my money."

"We must meet those two at the evening train," she said; "they are coming, by some fatality, together."

Norman read the letter slowly and regretted his inability to help. He was going to Caherdeen to lunch and see a young horse, an appointment of some days' standing.

Shelia sighed again, realizing that she must cope alone with unknown relatives. So far neither uncle nor aunt had specified any sum. Uncle James' promises were vaguely tempting, but not definite; still, it was apparent by his letters that a very large cheque would be theirs when he left.

"Better not to cloud our arrangements with the sordidness of weekly payments," wrote Uncle James. "Dear Norman would rather have a lump sum at the end. A present, in fact"—so he would all the winter be their grateful guest; yet afterwards young people could always do with spending money, and would have some—"a few odd hundreds," suggested Uncle James airily, "just to do a little spree with. And a certainty, for the old man, that his own people will have his money when he dies."

Uncle James' letters were always charming, but Norman, as he read them, deduced that age was the last thing his relative would wish to own to, as he harped upon it so constantly when he wrote. Aunt Jane, on the contrary, wrote plainly upon the subject of payment, the visit being of her choosing, but in this letter she crystallized her hints to a small drop of icy clearness.

"Two pounds a week, my dear niece. As I drink nothing save spring water (I hope you have got a filter), it is the one thing I am particular about. Grape nuts in the morning are now ordered for me, and hot milk at bedtime." Also she wished to be called at seven, so as to give a clear hour for religious meditation, and she preferred an earthenware hot-water bottle in her bed.



A fire, too, in her room, if the housemaid had no objections.

“ Fifty stone of oats a week, that won’t go far,” said Norman cheerfully.

“ Two pounds a week,” said Shelia uncertainly. “ I wonder if it’s right.”

“ She’ll want to leave us a whole mine to make up,” said Norman. “ And when she sees Paddy prancing up with a tin can straight from the well, and Maria tells her about eight that faix an’ indeed she shlep’ it out——”

“ It’s beautiful spring water,” said Shelia indignantly. “ and Maria does get up as a rule. Oh, Norman,” she took his arm with a rare note of helplessness in her voice, “ I do wish we never had. Mary’s daughter hasn’t learnt to cook yet, and old Mary doesn’t come up often now to show her. And—oh, dear, blow the deed and Pat ! ” cried Shelia inelegantly and loudly.

“ The divil shweep ’em up with his own house-twig,” chimed Mickey as he came up. “ Isn’t me heart scalded, an’ me huntin’ for snares ? ”

“ Mickey puts it the right way,” said Norman thoughtfully. “ I’ll hurry back, Shelia, and be here to meet them. Uncle James ”—he opened his letter—“ likes a south aspect, and prefers old claret to too much champagne—that’s thoughtful of him.”

Shelia drove to Johnstown station through an amber-tinted afternoon. Soft clouds, golden-edged, fringed the west, waiting for a pallid sun’s descent. Whips of white vapour, stretched across a sea of blue, spoke of coming wind and a change in the dry fine weather ; the whimper of rain lay below the wind’s soft murmur. She drove through the level grass-banked country, and the beauty of its light and shade touched her as it had never done before. Mile upon mile of green, sloping

upwards to a range of hills, shadow-flecked, their summits biting sharply at the clear air, as they, too, heralded rain.

It was an evening so sweet to look on that the pleasure of it stung with a keen whip of pain. So fair, so lovable, bathed in the grey purple tints which only Ireland knows. Watching, one felt wistfully the inevitable day when the eyes which looked on it now, the life which throbbed to the freshness of it, would be closed, deep buried under green sods, and others, who had never known us with our little weary hopes and fears, would drive through the quiet land. Shelia, whose life had been too happy to breed much thought, felt it now; so much so that the reins lay loosely on the spirited chestnut mare's back, and she dropped to a crawl, and then to a sober walk, breasting a long slope.

How often Shelia had ridden home along that road, tired and happy, full of her day's sport, riding all her fences over again with a true fox-hunter's zest! From her earliest childhood her feet had trodden the pleasant places of the earth. Healthy, not hampered by over-education, she had grown up drinking in the cool, sweet breath of the air, running wild across bogs, through woods, until, as natures will, she took colour from her surroundings, and was as simple and fresh as the land she lived in. Her girlhood, when she had been wooed by many lips, had been as happy. Her marriage with the stranger she had had to propose to—Shelia smiled at the memory—happier still. Checking a little the imperiousness which had grown upon her in her solitary resting. And now, with her life stretching out in a placid, golden stream, she had rushed round a bend upon the rocks. Lack of money—the bitterness of losing what had so long been hers—warped every hour. Shelia, business-like as she was, had been too well off to under-

stand money's true value. Never extravagant, she had gone where she pleased and bought as she pleased, and seldom known a checked desire or thwarted wish.

Had it not been for this she would not have been driving down the lonely road to Johnstown to receive two who were to be her guests for the whole winter. A week of Aunt Jane's prim, religious, essentially Saxon company might have been endured, but no more. It was not the immediate gain—fifty stone of oats a week, as Norman put it, was too little for that—it was the future replacement of lost money to her son which had really decided Shelia. Young Desmond would appreciate the coal mines when he grew up, and thank his mother for what she had done. Also—Shelia checked the chestnut, which she resented by shying into the hedge—half Pat Maguire's triumph would die strangled when he heard of the rich relatives who were coming to them.

Already she had heard Mickey declaiming triumphantly how there "was two ould ones comin' that was goin' to die and make the masther an' missus their heir, an' to lave 'im mill'ons of money, no less—God spheed them."

That Mickey intended the last remark to refer to an early death was unfortunately overclear.

A second dash into the hedge, and "Have a care, ma'am," from the boy on the back seat roused Shelia from her reverie. She wheeled into the broader road, leading to the station, and drove over the steep bridge crossing the line. The signals were down, and a great crowd hummed upon the little platform. Emigrants, deserting their own little world for the rush and hurry of America. It draws them as a magnet, with its tales of wealth and splendour gathered from those who rise

out there on the hurrying, troubled waters. Of the many who sink and drown they take no heed. So the youth of Ireland goes, and the aged and the children strive in the little farms and fail, where strong hands and clearer brains would have succeeded.

Rows of carts filled the station enclosure, piles of untidy baggage humped upon the narrow platform. Many were going, and every relative and friend and lover they owned had swarmed to see them off.

Some were crying, some making ready to cry. Big men's lips trembled as the smoke of the coming train stained the air; boys and girls burst into sudden grief, regretting the step they were taking. The golden promise did not repay them now, as, inevitable as death, the steam monster snorted on to take them from the quiet green land they had been born in.

Shelia could watch the platform over the railings; she did not wish to mix with the surging, disconsolate crowd. The train drew up with a jar, and she scanned the carriages rather drearily and with a sinking heart. For a moment, as the emigrants rushed at the opening doors, she saw no one who looked like her aunt; then a primly hatted head appeared from a third-class window, and a lady, grasping a large, square dressing-case, attempted to get out, somewhat vainly, for as she stepped upon the platform she was lost in a wave of keenly weeping humanity, which elected to sweep into the carriage she had occupied. The travellers scurried in, flinging down parcels, then crowding to the windows; those left gathering round with outstretched hands and streaming eyes. Then the haunting Irish keen drowned all save the loudest voices; old women, rocking with misery, raising it.

The only porter wrestled with the crowd of boxes

labelled for America, and in the intervals yelled good-byes to some unseen Mike.

Shelia gasped heavily before she melted to an unrestrained grin. Aunt Jane might have fought her way to the edge of the crowd, but she would have died rather than desert her parcels and the square dressing-case carefully wrapped in brown holland. Shelia saw her relative's little cross face as it peered at intervals through the mass. Her open mouth was evidently talking loudly, but the people hemmed her in, jamming her close to the open door.

A red-moustached man, short of stature as he was large of heart, reached groping, tear-blinded hands to a girl who leant from the window.

"Bridgie—arraah, Bridgie!" he wailed, the fieriness of his breath telling that whisky helped his grief.

"Porter—por-ter!" squeaked Aunt Jane in rabid helplessness, her voice rising for a second shrilly above the din.

"Bridgie!" sobbed Martin Cassidy. Shelia knew him well. As he longed for a last embrace he happened to kick the dressing-case, and felt its square solidity. Without a moment's hesitation he drew it beneath his feet, and, mounting on it, flung his arms about the girl's neck, while "Bridgie, Bridgie!" he wept between his kisses.

The plucks upon his coat-tails, the feeble, furious scratchings of Aunt Jane at his legs, being totally unheeded—or taken for sympathy.

Shelia, now bordering on hysteria as Peter the boy, muttering "God help us, she's destr'yed," now left the dogcart and made his way to the station-master to beg for assistance.

Maher, scratching his head, dubiously declared, "Ye



might as well try to bale the Atlantic with an egg-spoon as sthop that crowd"; but he plunged to the rescue, his goal a black toque bobbing up and down.

"All we can do is to sthart her," he cried over his shoulder to Shelia. "Sthand clear there! Patsy, blow a blasht ov yere whistle. Give her the bell, Patsy, shmart now. Give her the bell and let her off. Mikey, go aisy."

The guard whistled and waved his flag, the train started a cautious crawl, and the crowd, now keening soulfully, fell back. Big men, unashamed of tears, comforted by brother men; girls sobbing shrilly; the old shawled women raising their mournful cry. Martin Cassidy, pushed away by Bridgie, got off the dressing-case, and turned, weeping bitterly, to Miss Brown, with some vague idea in his hunger for sympathy that she had been his helpful friend.

"An' God love ye for yere kindly heart," he gulped, "an' the loan of yere thrunk. Ah, Bridgie's gone from me—this day—me Bridgie! But thank ye, ma'am," he sobbed again, resting one ponderous, hopeless hand upon Aunt Jane's back, while with the other he took and squeezed her blackly gloved hands.

Whether at this point Aunt Jane would have had a fit or gone mad it is impossible to say, for as she rocked before the onslaught, the station-master, fervently wishing that all emigrants would go all their ways by water, pushed Cassidy aside, kindly bidding him to cheer up, picked up the dented case and all the parcels, and thrust Aunt Jane before him through the wailing crowd.

"I—have never—been so outraged in my life. I shall report it. See the proper authorities, claim damages——" the thin voice squeaked in front of him as he urged her through.



"If ye goes third ye must expect emigrants," said Maher without emotion; "though, indeed, I'm thinking poor Martin has jam made of yere little thrunk."

"How are you, Aunt Jane?" said Shelia weakly, for she was overwrought by suppressed laughter, and she looked about for her other relation. He appeared suddenly, absolutely unruffled—a cherubic, blue-eyed little man, carefully dressed.

"I got out of the way and waited," he remarked pleasantly, "seeing you. It was the easier way. I suppose our things are out?"

"Miss Brown—Mr. Rivers," said Shelia. And then started as Aunt Jane stiffened and Uncle James coloured pinkly.

"We have met—before," said Miss Brown grimly.

Shelia sat down, overcome. Aunt Jane and Uncle James were the two she had watched and laughed at at Guernsey—the pair they had referred to on the bus; she grew scarlet, hoping they had not heard—the travelers on the steamer who had sat together in green-hued misery—the little man who had come away with suspicious suddenness.

"To be sure—we had tea together," said Mr. Rivers airily. "I remember so well."

"And you owe me a shilling," observed Miss Brown tartly.

Uncle James raised astonished eyebrows. Was it really possible that he had forgotten to pay? He was ashamed.

Aunt Jane, as the porter collected her boxes with an easy hope that none was on their way to the "Sthates," opened her purse in visible expectation.

"I'll tip the porter for you now, and that will square

us," said James Rivers pleasantly, as he counted several immaculate cases and then sauntered outside.

The luggage cart awaited the pile of baggage; the boy returning by it to give room for them in the dogcart.

When Miss Brown had counted her things several times they were permitted to start, and Shelia suddenly remembered that one would have to sit behind, a guilty twinge of conscience reminding her that she ought to have brought the motor. Observing the horrified glances of both travellers at the back seat, she made somewhat lame allusions to its extreme comfort.

Uncle James, prodding it gently, said he preferred sitting behind. "But, alas! the penalty of weight——" He mounted nimbly beside Shelia. "Dear Miss Brown must deprive me of my place to equalize the balance. Give the lady a hand, porter."

Aunt Jane's glance was positively baneful, her very back expressed displeasure as she stiffened it unhappily, and, hooking one hand about the rail, was careful to see that her elbow reached the small of James Rivers' back.

"I did not know you expected other guests," she said viciously, as the chestnut plunged restively through the gate and started at her skimming trot.

"Yes—it's only three miles, and Norman's got the motor. Hold tight, Aunt Jane, she shies," said Shelia, feeling more like a reprovéd child than she had since her babydom.

If horses take intuitive dislikes it would really have appeared that Goldfinch had made up her mind about Aunt Jane. A butterfly winging dolefully in search of dead summer, a flapping rook, even a mere sparrow were all enough to send her rocketing from hedge to hedge with a shattering swiftness. Goldfinch was a lady, she knew better than to put the cart into the ditch, but the

long claw-fingered brambles laid playful hands upon the occupants of the trap as they swished against the hedges.

Trailing ripening blackberries smote Aunt Jane upon the nose, thorns reft a feather from her hat; her protestations were hushed in grim waiting for the sudden plunges, in a positive clinging for life as her light form was hurled from side to side.

Uncle James seemed to possess nerves of iron. He smoked and discussed the landscape placidly, occasionally making pretty and unheeded conversation for the benefit of the distraught lady on the back seat.

"There is, after all," said Uncle James, "nothing like life carrying life. No motor-car could fill me with the joy of this splendid animal."

"She's generally a lamb," said Shelia, unhappily conscious that Aunt Jane was wiping a scratch on her nose, "but to-day she seems possessed."

"Does—the brute mind—motors?" rose in sudden staccato from the back seat.

"Very little. It's Norman; he'll take you the rest of the way." Shelia tightened her reins and turned her head, and Aunt Jane prepared to descend. Now at other times Goldfinch simply curveted a little, but to-day she was upset. No sooner had the swift throb-throb come near than she swept forward at a lively gallop, utterly declining to stop, dashed through the lodge gates and up the avenue, with Aunt Jane half kneeling, clinging to her perch. The chestnut stopped at the steps and received her scolding limply. She was then ashamed of herself.

Poor Aunt Jane, assisted from her insecure position, was really shaken and also really cross. Her manner, as she requested to be shown her room, was a judicious blend of vinegar and pepper, well iced.

She sank upon a chintz-covered sofa, and regretted that her windows did not face the south, while Shelia proffered tea.

"I shall join you at it." Aunt Jane produced lavender water. "Weak, if you please, Shelia; and I take toast and sponge cake."

Shelia cast an uneasy eye upon the avenue. It was quite possible that the baker had not come. She went away, leaving Maria to minister to her relative.

Norman and his uncle were in the front, sitting on a bench below a great beech, where the boughs had been cut and fastened to form an arbour, and it was Shelia's favourite resting-place in summer. In early June one looked through the tenderest green in the world up at the faint blue distance of the sky. Later, the leaves darkened and grew thicker, but it was always cool in there, with a faint breeze rustling softly. A rustic table and two deep seats made it a pleasant place for tea.

Uncle James was talking softly in the mellow voice note which sounds as if a perpetual sugar-plum rolled in the owner's mouth. His plump, small-fingered hands were brushing trouble aside as, in answer to Norman's plaint concerning the lawsuit, he suggested that the present was nothing, as the future might bring so much.

Uncle James hinted darkly that alive he was not worth much, but dead—and the sudden gleam in his blue eyes was a distinct warning to Death to stand hands off—dead, he could do much for them. His little stocks and shares, somewhat slumpish as all shares were at present, would yet be wells and fountains of pure gold, bathing his nephew in the pleasant waters. It was balm to his kindly heart to meet his young relative. Mentally Uncle James took them to his bosom and adopted them for all time. Yet Shelia,

drumming soft, white fingers upon the rustic table, felt she would prefer the certainty of the present to the nebulous futurity of Uncle James' millions.

"You are lucky not to have lost heavily." Shelia turned her grey eyes upon Norman's uncle. "Which of your shares are doing well, Uncle James?"

A faint tinge of pink stained the little man's cheek. He glanced suddenly at the paper in his hand.

"Mines"—he said vaguely, "South African. . . . I bought at a panic, and they are most hopeful. . . ."

His answer as to the name was testy, and was not given without some search in the paper.

"These names slip my memory," said Uncle James pleasantly. "Ah, I see the postman leaving." He drew a registered envelope from his pocket, then, searching in his pocket-book, frowned. All his change, it appeared, was in his portmanteau, not yet arrived, and the small debt was one already forgotten. If Norman could oblige him until the evening—just two pounds. Norman found two sovereigns and handed them over. The address, Shelia noted, was somewhere in Bloomsbury, to a boarding-house. Maria, having escaped from Aunt Jane, now arrived, over-heavily laden with tray and cups, and uttering plainly audible remarks aside to Shelia that indeed she thought the "ould lady's sthomach was upsot on the boat. She was that sour in herself. A pinch of soda," murmured Maria as she put old china cups on the snowy cloth, "they do say is wonderful fer settlin' ye. I brought a taste out, ma'am, if ye could make her take it."

The thunderous appearance of Aunt Jane cut short these confidences, and Maria sped for the teapot swiftly.

The comfort of the deep wooden seats, the cool hush of the lacing beech boughs, failed to soothe the shaken



lady. Grumbles positively oozed from her thin lips ; she suspected dampness, and suggested earwigs, and proffered her hideous fear of spiders. Shelia, guiltily flicking a lean-bodied, long-legged specimen from her white dress, said they all kept outside.

The glass-dimmed glare of Aunt Jane's eyes fell upon the array of food. There were several kinds of cake, sandwiches, and little hot buns, but the plate of dry toast was not forthcoming, and Maria, asked for it, shook her head.

A wicket gate, not far from where they sat, opened on to the road along which the baker passed to Duna. It wound away beyond the gate round a wide belt of trees ; here it was quite close to the house. Her capstrings flying, Maria ran to the gate, peering out, and Shelia, driven by the resignation of Aunt Jane's manner as she sipped tea and declined food, followed her.

"It's the baker," explained Norman. "He's often late. Stopped a bit too long at the last pub, I expect."

A whirl of dust rose far down the road. Maria unearthed a basket from the trees and half opened the gate. Aunt Jane herself now followed them, sourly declaiming the fact that bread was not toast, and she was now prepared to do without, but she really thought most houses had a stock of bread, and so forth, until Shelia's remorse vanished and she watched the approaching blur thoughtfully.

"I think he's very bad, Maria," she remarked placidly.

The blur crystallized into a ponderous wagon rocking from side to side, with the horse in it urged to a clumsy gallop, while on the box sat a red-faced man whipping hard and singing lustily.

He came, he saw—but he made no pause. The great cart merged again into a cloud of dust ; the



wretched horse was lashed forward, but no bread came to the watchers at the gate.

"It was Patrick's Day last time," said Shelia placidly, "that he passed and left us no bread. It has happened before."

Aunt Jane almost squealed her wrath as she watched the vanishing cart until the bulging wall hid it. "You will, of course, report him—have him dismissed."

"He would say he had forgotten the day. Besides, he's Hannah Anne's cousin. How could I?" said Shelia. "Maria, just send Tom up to Daly's to borrow some bread. She was in town to-day, and is sure to have some."

Aunt Jane retired, snorting, to the shelter of the tree, where she made an excellent meal and entertained them all with the dire internal vengeance which would descend upon her.

The return of Maria with a plate of crisp toast urged her appetite to further effort. Also, she wished to know the name of the filter used for the water she would drink at dinner.

Maria, previously warned, said the name was beyond her; but the "wather was clearer than di'monds." "Though for meself," said Maria, who could never resist speaking, "I can't understand them that'll drink like a horse or a cow when they can bile a cup of tay like a Christian."

The hauteur of Aunt Jane's glance left her unmoved as she picked up her tray and left, and the burden of the retorting lecture fell upon Shelia.

The absolute wickedness of possessing bakers who fled past gates with the household bread—the lack of housekeeping capabilities in one who could allow it—the over licence of Maria's ready tongue, and so forth,

until her niece's head hummed for a space, and she heard the drift of acid words without gathering their meaning.

Uncle James strolled up and down with Norman, consuming cigars; his little hands always weaving webs of golden and silver tissue. It was impossible not to feel one's spirits rise, listening to the painting of the future. As they passed, Shelia could hear scraps of buoyant plans. Uncle James would add a fernery to that dark corner of the house, sink an ornamental lake in the marsh hollow at the foot of the garden—it would cost merely a few hundreds—plant it with water-lilies and surround it with a garden of moisture-loving flowers—with the trickle of stream it would not be a difficult task. When the other stocks rise . . . the old man might manage a little present, prattled Uncle James . . . a little memento of his visit here.

Shelia, growing tired of housekeeping lessons, suggested a visit to the garden; they skirted the marshy hollow and turned up a shady path to the huge walled-in square, one of the many which our ancestors enclosed without any thought of the rise in wages.

Three acres had been gathered in at Dunmore, and Shelia often groaned as she watched them. It was an Irish medley of rare flowers and common vegetables, chequered by great cabbages in line behind the rose bushes. Cactus dahlias ablaze before a great square of turnips. Late pears mellowed and ripened, apples hung on the spreading old trees. No annual or bedder ever disturbed the dignity of the wide tile-edged borders, which from April to September were always full of bloom. Perhaps the only person Shelia was afraid of on earth was Stephen the gardener. He had been a gnarled, cross old man when she was a child; he was a gnarled, cross old man now, apparently unchanged, and

still a tyrant in his old kingdom. How Shelia in days gone by had fled before his onslaught as she dived among the nets for ripe red strawberries, or foraged on the sunny walls for golden plums or deep red cherries!

"An' thim same I'm keepin' for the jam, and there's plenty the wasps has ate a bit out of for childern." Shelia had never failed to tremble when the surly tones came rasping at her—never dared to argue that the fruit was her own. Stephen looked on every berry and flower as distinctly his, to be dealt with at his pleasure.

Even now she picked the roses or fruit with guilty glances across the garden and carefully concealed hopes that Stephen might not see her.

He was just inside the gate as they went in, picking plums, and he looked up curiously. Stephen ceased to be surly when he discussed Shelia's wrongs; all his tough old pride was hurt by the arrival of guests who meant to pay, and he pinched at each spotted fruit viciously, grudging their mellow fairness. To pass without greeting him would have been dire offence. Shelia, smiling, without much hope of its rendering him amiable, asked him if he remembered Miss Brown.

Stephen flicked away a wasp and studied Aunt Jane with that clarity of observation which at a certain age is so hard to bear.

"Eighteen years ago ye were here," he said thoughtfully. "I'd know ye."

Miss Brown, hoping for compliment, remarked sweetly that Stephen had not changed in the least.

"An' ye won't change much yerself now that ye're as ould as I was thin," said Stephen, unmoved by flattery. "I'd know yere nose anywheres, but that's nearly all. Ye should dhrink a sup of milk, ma'am, before the bones'd shake in ye. Me ant's mother, that's

sixty, an' that's older than yerself"—here Aunt Jane quivered—"tuk to it, an' she got that sthrong ye could see the buttonholes tearin' on her——"

Aunt Jane, stung in woman's ever vulnerable spot, her age, made a mistake . . . she said acidly that she was not in the least too thin . . . and turned her back upon Stephen.

The sour old eyes peered out thoughtfully as she stalked up the garden path and sniffed at a monthly rose.

"An' she like an oat sthalk," said Stephen contemptuously. "Arrah, Miss Shelia"—he never called her anything else—"give over atin' unripe plums. Ye're as bad as the baby." Uncle James picked two from the leaf, a desire to please which failed utterly, for thunderous grumbles concerning the fruit "chose out" for dinner rolled in his wake as he went on.

Norman, who feared no one, stayed to talk to the old man.

Dinner might have been a pleasanter meal if the new cook had been less untested. Uncle James' aspect over the soup was one of pained surprise—the curry he buried politely out of sight, and even the chickens, though excellent, presented a flurried and too active appearance.

Aunt Jane ate with prim precision and a want of discernment which would have been cheering if she had not absorbed assorted tabloids at each course, and doubted the water earnestly.

She retired early, carrying with her Maria, a hot bottle, boiled milk, and several biscuits, her departure being checked a little by a heated wrangle with Uncle James concerning the absolute sin of absorbing whisky at so late an hour—as she observed his preparations for the night.

Shelia flung the French windows wide and stepped out into the great softness of the outside world. "She's worse than ever, Boy; we were mad."

Norman, ever optimistic, said old James would make everything all right. "Simply full of spending money on us," said the hopeful nephew. "Anyhow, that boy will be well off."

"With a male and female set of mines," said Shelia gloomily. "Norman—I wonder—I hope I don't wonder right. How many of these mines are in the ground?"

Norman said he hoped they were none of them in the air, and joined her, putting his arm round her shoulders. The sudden softness in her eyes was something he alone knew.

"Anyhow, we've got each other and the old house"; and he said gently, "You're worrying, girl."

"Because just now"—a window slammed above them—"we have two other things," said Shelia, putting back her fair head, "things that will grumble—until Anne learns to cook—and have fits if they find out the well below the bog. What's the use of futurity, Boy, when you can never have it in the present?"

Norman gave it up promptly, but sighed, deeply for him, as they went in.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN AFTERNOON AT CASTLE GRANAGH

"My Father left a Park,  
But it is wild and barren."—*Tennyson*.

WHEN Maria arrived with early tea she remarked somewhat sourly that "early risin' was a good thing, but she never before heard bells hammerin' from six out, and

unless the missus told the cook to bank the fires, she didn't see how cups of tea could be carried to Miss Brown's room before seven, and hot wather to melt them white square pills she do take," said Maria contemptuously. "An' I tould her 'twould be bettther for her to put her trust in one of thim spirity lamps than in young Kate Doolan."

Breakfast at Dunmore was a meal which awaited the pleasure of Shelia and Norman. On cold days it was eaten immediately, but in summer time it simmered on copper heaters while garden and stables were visited.

On this morning the sky was staring blue, with a hem of ominous cloudlets on the horizon, and it was hot as June. It tempted Shelia, hatless, out to sun with the terriers across the lawn and far into the paddock to look at the foals. It took Norman off to Mickey to discuss birds and beasts and horses, which of course ranked alone, and both returned to the thunderous awaiting of Aunt Jane, sitting very upright, her nerves evidently stretched to breaking-point by Shelia's boy, who drummed upon the table with a spoon, and said he'd come for "bread and dam."

The argument as to the use of the proper letter was in swing when they got in.

That boy, his eye upon the brimming dish of fat strawberries floating in syrup, said it tasted just the same, and that father never said jam, but always the other—especially when he was cross.

Aunt Jane's attempt to prove the wickedness of the letter floated by him as wind-driven mist. For so far no one had tried to prove any deed of his evil, and he only knew good and faint vexation.

"I thinks"—that boy spoke with few childish



affectations—"I think you know nothing about dam, Aunt Jane," he remarked severely. Then, being above all things a polite host, proffered invitation for her to come and sail flagger boats on the pond while they waited. "It's lovely and muddy there," said Desmond rapturously. "Times you go down over your knees."

"And your clothes," said Miss Brown severely.

"They washes," said Desmond callously.

Shelia entering hastily cut short the conversation. For the future she entreated Aunt Jane to commence without her, and she firmly removed her son.

Aunt Jane, prodding a tepid egg with the resignation which is so hard for the onlooker to bear, enlarged on the education of Master Desmond.

"I should be happy myself," she said, "to undertake to teach him his catechism and some collects."

"Oh, do," said Shelia drily. "Do, Aunt Jane," and she gazed at her placid-faced son.

Uncle James was breakfasting upstairs on grapes, cold chicken, and light claret. A combination termed by Maria "haythenish," and causing a crescendo of grumbles from old Stephen as he cut the purple berries grudgingly—and then locked the greenhouse door behind him with a vicious rasp.

"There'll be none for the dinner to-night," said Stephen crossly, when he met his mistress. "Clar't, indade! I went down to Rathdrum once with a rich cousin, and nothin' would do him but to be out on the common and ask for a bottle of clar't. An' he gave me a glassful. Ink. I tell ye, bitther, bitther black ink, but aftherwards, when I ran a glass of whisky through it, 'twasn't half so bad."

When Uncle James, spruce and plump, came down, and Aunt Jane's morning temper had improved, they

all went out—round to the back of the house to the square yard with its range of spacious airy boxes, and rows of bay and brown and grey velvety muzzled noses peering out. Here Mickey was getting a stable-boy to hold his gun while he attended Tom bandaging up the doubtful fore-legs, and Norman got ready to ride a young one. Shelia's short skirt did duty for a habit. She too would ride on Grey Dawn and see how he went.

The long grass in the five-acre field was thick and soft. They cantered the horses, the youngster bucking as he sniffed up the wind and felt the turf beneath his hoofs. Grey Dawn, striding easily with cocked ears and arched neck, too great a gentleman to plunge as he longed to. He did it once as Aunt Jane, peering over the gate, dropped her parasol at his feet, and Shelia sat on him with a careless laugh and pulled him up.

Aunt Jane's grey eyes glinted behind their glasses, her thin little nostrils were working. She too had ridden years ago.

Aunt Jane's system was one which required much nourishing. A chart had been written out, and there were several interludes of the arrival of Maria, now with a wineglass of melted tabloid which she announced as the "physic ye wanted." A cup of milk and soda, accompanied by some weird patent food which professed to hold a concentrated cornfield in an ounce, or something like that, and later, before lunch, with more tabloids, dry this time, and wheaten biscuits.

Mac came to lunch, his usual merry countenance somewhat gloomy, as he sorrowfully announced that Cherry Boy, a chestnut colt, had thrown out curbs and "was lame as ten bushes."

"Just when I'd dug out another bit of that garden, too, and meant to slate over the library with his price,"

said Mac sourly. "Oh, it's hard to get on. I met old Slade yesterday, and he talked to me for ten minutes, all about the folly of racing and his determination never to allow his daughter to marry a racing man. The kind of talk you knew he'd got hot in his mouth for days," said Mac inelegantly, "well peppered and sauced and ready to serve. Well, the roof will have to wait. I meant to ask him to tea when the men were at it. It's like a sieve now."

Aunt Jane, open-eyed, wished to know if he meant the slates were really off, and if he realized the danger of the whole roof being lifted.

Mac turned sombre eyes upon her. "Slates off?" he said. "Of course they are—the water running in like hail on my head—but thank God"—Mac's gravity was intense—"there's only one little hole in the old carriage umbrella, and when it's gone I can get the hood of the landau fixed where I sit."

Miss Brown gasped heavily.

"And yet—you keep horses?" she said sharply. "How iniquitous!"

"How could I ride to hounds if I didn't?" said Mac indignantly.

"And that"—Uncle James chose a cigar with care and asked for a second glass of port—"that, in Ireland, would appear to be a species of necessity. A microbe in the blood, as it were."

"And in the air," said Mac, waxing eloquent for him. "Something that calls to you in the wind and the grey skies and the soft rain. Something in our blood that's stronger than all prudence and common sense. The music of the hounds; the run; fields and fences—they cry to us too. Roofs rot and garden squares go untilled; but out we come in November,

coated and booted and perhaps with horses on credit, with every nerve in us a-quiver for a gallop. It's true, isn't it, Norman ? ”

Norman nodded silently. For it had come to him and held him many years ago, this call of the Irish blood, this joy in winter skies and swift motion with the straining pack in front, the keenness of the stalkers when, beaten, they puzzled it out, eager noses to earth, wistful faces alight, thirsting for blood. The thrill of a triumph almost shared when the master, keen as his hounds, brought brain to help noses, and casting, hit it off. There it was. Priestess' note rang out. Pansy dashed to her. Our prey has gone this way. . Crash and wealth of full-throated music ere they settled down again, echoing perhaps to a tired fox who knew he must hurry or die.

And Aunt Jane, sniffing disapproval, yet felt her breath come faster and her thin cheeks flush. For it was in her blood too, though washed away by years of poverty and meanness, this red spot of sport.

“ I too have ridden.” The third glass of port made Uncle James' voice sound as though he sucked a bull's-eye. “ I really think when my shares rise I must buy a stout cob and come out—or perhaps you could lend, Norman.”

Norman shook his head, mildly observing that there wasn't a really quiet horse in the stable.

“ Then there must be dealers here who can supply me,” said Uncle James.

The glint of battle rose in Mac's blue eyes. “ I haven't got a cob,” he said, leaning forward and speaking confidently ; “ but I have a sweet chestnut mare, quiet as a sheep, ride her in a silk thread, manners of a princess, put her nose on a motor, and I could let

you have her. She's got a perfect shoulder too—just the thing to keep you on."

"A paragon," said Uncle James, while Shelia, seeing Mac's solemnly rapt face, winked at Norman.

"She's no use to me, for she makes just the least shade of a noise," said Mac, "and she's just too slow to race." Also for hounds, he might have added, but didn't. "A picture to halt round at meets," said Mac; "she has a touch of a bump on one fetlock that she got jumping the stone wall behind Slattery's, otherwise she's unblemished."

Uncle James, visibly impressed, supposed Mr. Macnamara would want a fortune for this treasure.

"Not to a friend. I'd take fifty pounds for her—as she stands—just throwing her away," and Mac leant back with the air of a man who has done the most gracious deed of his life, though in his inmost soul he knew that, failing the taking of some innocent such as Uncle James, the chestnut mare would shortly pull a hansom in London.

Uncle James nodded his silver-fringed head and wished he could. "But at present," he said drily, "ready money is a difficulty."

"You could pay when it suited you," said Mac pleasantly.

"Oh!" Uncle James grew suddenly thoughtful. This was another matter.

"And that reminds me"—Mac looked on Shelia with such clarity of innocence that she knew some deep scheme stirred in his active brain—"I came over really to ask you all to tea. I told Biddy to make hot cakes, and it's not raining, so we'll be dry in the library."

Shelia looked hard down the avenue as if she ex-

pected to see either a pony-trap or a bicycle ; then she looked back at Murrough Macnamara and accepted.

Norman said that he was going with Mickey to look at a bog, but he would bicycle, leaving the motor for Shelia, and turn up in time for tea.

Mac drove with them ; he had walked across the fields, and Norman's chauffeur, Carty, one time a youthful carpenter, hurled them with skilful recklessness along narrow, ill-kept roads, until they swooped in the wide rusty gate of Castle Granagh. Stone monsters, chipped and moss-grown, guarded the massive structure, peering with set melancholy eyes up the ruddy avenue. It was a long straight path, diving into a mass of gloomy evergreen oaks, and emerging from the dark bath as a full-grown and extremely neglected sweep, leading through melancholy relics of former riches to the great ramshackle old house. Pampas grasses ; half-dead rhododendrons and azalea bushes rose above unclipped coarse grass ; climbing roses tumbled over rotting archways ; flower-beds were marked by humping mounds and an extra luxuriousness of thistle and nettle. Opposite the hall door things were slightly better, several uneven ridges and a languishing mowing machine showing that Mac had begun to tidy and then given it up. He had scrabbled a little, too, in some old flower-beds, disturbing their crop of weeds. Entrance to the house was now made through a side door, for the big one above the stone steps required two men to push it, and even then the broken hinges gave trouble. Mac camped in a few rooms in the west wing, where sunshine helped to counteract a leaking roof, and the neglected unpruned trees were not too close. His own den was a pleasant untidy place, filled with shabby comfortable chairs, which seemed to speak of happily tired man



resting and smoking as he dreamed of his day's sport, and with stray pieces of good old furniture ranged stiffly about. A pile of letters—most of them unopened—lay upon a rich-hued inlaid bureau; and the silver laid upon the tea-table was more valuable than many of Mac's horses.

Of course, by the strangest coincidence, they had barely got there when Miss Nancy Slade, in her pony-cart, arrived in much trouble, announcing that some strap in the harness was quite beyond her power of adjustment.

"And how lucky to find you all here, for now I can come in," said Miss Nancy sweetly.

"Remarkably lucky," said Shelia drily, introducing Nancy to her relatives.

Uncle James looked upon the tumbledown place leniently; he was evidently not at all sure that he would not buy the chestnut mare. And Aunt Jane's sniffs of disapproval would not have discredited the most serious cold. It was evident from her snapping remarks that she only waited for opportunity to overwhelm Mac with a flood of verbal disapproval.

Old Biddy had not failed, and there were relays of smoking cakes of feather-like lightness. There were also several others which looked as if they came from Fuller, and a huge box of most expensive sweets standing invitingly open. Shelia, eyeing them, smiled to herself. Mac had not neglected preparations.

His conversation, when he took his eyes off Nancy, who looked exceedingly pretty, was all of his wonderful horse. So many times had he hoped and failed, but this time there would be no failure.

The colt had been highly tried, and, half fit as he was, had shown speed and stamina of no common order.

Mac talked with airy confidence of the races he would win, the huge price he would eventually realize, and Nancy's eyes sparkled above her walnut cake.

If Mac could only succeed, make a little money, and tidy up his half-ruined house, she might succeed in coaxing her father to let her come and live there and use his money to complete the restoration. Once married with her father's consent, Nancy had no fears of being left in poverty, but she knew also that if she dared to take the law into her own hands, she might never heal the breach between them.

She moved now to one of the windows, looking out across the sunlit lawn. In imagination she saw it clipped to velvet smoothness, flowers growing there, tennis grounds marked out, and a completely happy young woman holding Mac's arm as they strolled among their roses. So moving was the picture that Nancy sighed deeply, and then started as the throb of a motor broke the stillness outside. She could see the dust disc, then a white-bodied car flashing into view and pulling up at the swing gate, as an elderly gentleman got stiffly out.

"It's father!" she gasped hurriedly.

The exclamation brought all the young people tumbling through the French windows on to the lawn. Mac looked at the mowing machine, at the peeling plaster on the walls, the unpainted window-sashes, the unraked gravel, and then up at the roof.

"And I told him I'd men in starting to do it up," cried Mac. "Never thinking he'd come here." His eyes lighting upon Mickey and the chauffeur, who were looking at some romping retriever puppies, lighted to swift resolve. "He'll be at the gate for five minutes, for he'll try to open the catch, and never think that's

gone for years, and you must undo the bit of cord," panted Mac as he flew to Mickey and Carty the chauffeur, explaining as he ran.

In less time than it seemed possible the two, nothing loath, were charging in at the side door and up the stiff stairs leading to an attic which led out on the roof—Mickey, of course, knowing his way.

By the time Mr. Slade had irately kicked the gate and then found the cord which he must undo, two figures had appeared upon the slope of the slates, and were busily bending over them. Mickey, full of resource, had snatched up a coal-bucket as he flew, "to look like bizness," oblivious of the fact that slaters do not use embossed brass vases of Grecian design to carry their tools in; he also held the pump of his bicycle; but Carty, having nothing, could only kneel and pick with his fingers.

The big car furrowed the gravel and drew up pompously. Mr. Slade, looking annoyed, got out.

"Mrs. Graves told me, Nancy, she saw you turn in here. You seemed in trouble about harness, she said, but would not wait until she came up with her man."

Nancy, bursting into voluble explanation, felt glad that the pony could not speak of the stinging whip which had urged him to gallop up the avenue. Her father accepted the flow of words with some reserve but no appearance of doubt; but the glances with which he swept the expanse of tangled bushes and rank grass were full of silent eloquence.

Mac, faintly nervous and very pale, strolled gently forward. "Bad times leave their mark," he said softly. "But I'm beginning to do it all up now, sir. Getting the front in order." Nancy's father looked long upon the mowing machine. "And mending the

roof—big job that,” said Mac, waving a cigarette heavenwards.

Mr. Slade stepped backwards and looked upwards. Mickey, rendered arrogant by the possession of a bicycle pump and bucket, was directing volubly as he trod the slates with the agility of a cat. The chauffeur, possessing a bad head, knelt sulkily, and the sunshine catching the bucket made it flame to ruddy gold.

Mr. Slade was short-sighted; he stared up, not ill-pleased.

“Glad to see it, Macnamara,” he said pleasantly. “Yes, a big job, roofing. Where are the men from?”

Norman turned his laugh into a sneeze with some success, but Mac’s voice trembled with reproach as he said “Cork,” and racked his brains for the name of a firm. “Cork—Crickey and Marty,” said Mac a little faintly.

“A new firm?” said Mr. Slade.

“Quite—at the work,” murmured Mac, listening with acute horror to a quarrel which rose and fell upon the sunlit roof. For Mickey was clearly urging the chauffeur to follow him to a more dangerous post, and the chauffeur would not. The scraps which drifted down were such as, “Ye sport spoilin’ craythur, one that ought to live in the mines for fear ye’d fall.” “Be damned if I does it to please ye, Mickey.” “Then stop squabblin’ while I shows them,” and so on. Mickey sped gracefully across the roof, while Carty, seeing all eyes were on them, felt he must do something to vindicate his assumed trade, so reft several half-broken slates from their places, and sped them down the steep slope with a careless air of knowing what he was about.

They fell with deadly swiftness so close to those below that Nancy screamed and fell into Mac’s arms,

her father swore, and Mickey returned madly, hauled the amateur slater forcibly from the roof, their heated voices pealing upwards from the flat well in the centre of the house. Mr. Slade remarked drily that he did not think he would himself employ that firm, and Mr. Murrough Macnamara removed his party hastily to the stables, calling to Shelia's guests, who were still eating, to come too.

The stable-yard was a vast and melancholy place, a huge square, grass-grown and unkempt, with little clearings scrabbled out among the waste of thistle and nettle—mere paths for horses to come out through. Here there were roofs worn to skeletons, with but a slate or two clinging to the whitening wooden rafters. Doors fallen from their hinges; a vast and cool, cavern-like coach-house filled with rotting carriages, amongst them the wreck of a coach which had once clattered across these stones, drawn by its high-spirited team. A man of millions might have built the huge square, with its stabling for forty horses, its sheds and lofts and boiler-houses, its laundry and tiled dairy and ranges of cowsheds in a second yard, instead of hopeful Irish squires, whose incomes in their youth had been but a few thousands, and who, in their folly, had made this now melancholy millstone to cling about the neck of their descendants. Through a stone archway one caught glimpses of a row of decaying houses, where grooms and stewards and stable helpers had once lived. One corner was watertight, with doors freshly painted, a wide alley before it hewn from the rank weed, and here in roomy boxes stood Mac's stud. A couple of weedy three-year-olds, which even an unskilled eye could tell were valueless—mere examples of high breeding gone astray, as breeding will. Two



hunters getting ready for the winter; the chestnut mare which he wished to sell to Uncle James; a raking bay four-year-old, rather high in the leg, but showy and likely to sell well; and, in a corner box, the prodigy. The others would do later, they must see him first. As the light rug was stripped from the colt by Mac's one groom—a series of seldom-paid boys came and went as the seasons—it looked as if he was really right at last.

Forefront was a big brown horse, a little unfurnished as yet, but with every promise of filling out into something quite out of the common. Sloping shoulders, well set on, deep-girthed, and strong-backed, galloping, powerful hocks and, an important thing for a chaser, a kind and gentle eye, with an entire absence of nervousness as the admiring crowd viewed him. Rather a sleepy horse, if anything.

“I—think—I’ve got it at last—the pea under the thimble.” Mac thrust his hands deep into his pockets. “One may think one’s own geese swans, Shelia, but that fellow looks as if he had a National in him.”

And Shelia, with unusual enthusiasm, said she believed he had.

“To win at Aintree—crums!” Mac leant against the door-post in an ecstasy of reverie. The great stands under the cold March light, the whip of chill winds, the roar of the vast crowd, the cream of England’s chasers parading. The start. Horses going down at those huge bushed-up fences, so many gone when they came at the water. Then the end—the hush—the strained terseness—a brown horse shooting out brave as a lion—a favourite’s rush—stalled off—then Forefront—Forefront—on a thousand tongues—bellowed by innumerable throats, and he, Mac, rushing down to



lead in. A thousand on at fifty to one—the stake. Mac's imagination ran a six-furlong sprint, and the world a rosy dream of bliss, with the old place *en fête* to receive his bride.

“The National?” Mr. Slade's eyes kindled a little. “Your fancy flies high, Macnamara. It would cost a great deal to enter and prepare him, would it not?”

“I could do that with his other winnings.” Then Mac came off the course of his imaginings and sat drearily upon the railings of reality. “But I'll have to wait two years to win, and some other ruffian will have tempted me with a few hundreds before then, and I shall have taken it, because I can't afford to wait. The man who wrote that money breeds money deserved to be the laureate they made him.”

Mr. Slade coughed and Shelia smiled discreetly.

They must see the colt out, and turned to look at the others while Con put a bridle on him. The chestnut, very lame behind, was a melancholy exhibition. The bay caught Uncle James' eye so much that he would not look at the mare, a level-made little thing, with too many good points quietly set on to catch the eye of the unobservant. It was evident that Uncle James fancied the prancing, high-stepping bay.

Aunt Jane peered nervously at the horses, remaining silent as to their merits, yet her hard grey eyes glittered and she clasped her hands when Forefront came stepping proudly out and stood against the background of ruin and nettles.

“If this animal really fulfilled your expectations”—Mr. Slade raised his eyebrows—“you might make some money, Macnamara.”

Mac stared at Nancy with a transparent promptitude which made her father frown and the daughter blush.

"But horses—are uncertain things. A blemish, a knock, and your prospects vanish. Far better take up something solid, work which shows results."

"I dug a whole garden square two months ago, and the groundsel's finer there than anywhere else," said Mac gloomily. "I might take up slating and do my own roof."

But at this point Mickey and Carty, the latter still sulky, appeared at the back door, and started back, seeing the visitors. Something bright fell with a clang as Mickey, who never lost his presence of mind, dropped the bucket and came forward.

"The slathers had a bit ov an accident above," he said gravely, "and they're away for the rest of the evening. They have great work done," said Mickey, enthusiastically; "that is, one of them; the other's betther at rippin' than mendin'." He eyed the chauffeur balefully.

"A most extraordinary workman," said Mr. Slade sharply, recalling the hail of slates. "There are some really reliable people in Cahervally—why not arrange with them?"

Mickey reduced the chauffeur to a purple hue by saying, "His own a'nt's grand-nephew'd be betther than that goomdown that was above them," and the slating was suddenly forgotten as Mr. Pat Maguire, riding a blood-like bay mare, came in through the great arched entrance. The self-satisfaction of his smile spread like a radiance across his red face, and his get-up of white breeches, brown boots, and gay grey coat was more suitable for polo than paying calls.

"Gripes! Patsy, no less," said Mickey audibly to the chauffeur, their quarrel being immediately merged in a united dislike and desire to injure Shelia's cousin.

"Fine eve—afternoon," said Pat affably. "I heard there was a great party of you all an' Shelia an' Norman, so I just came in to call on Mac."

The smile with which Mac acknowledged this kindness was Medusalike in its fierceness, but the Irish Perseus, gazing into his mirror of complacency, came on alive.

He wanted to meet the Slades. In fact, his brain had conceived the idea that when his new property was complete, Miss Slade would be just the girl for him to marry, and he had seized this opportunity.

"And how are you, Norman, and you, Shelia?" said Pat gaily. "An' this is your uncle you expected—and your aunt?" He shook hands affectionately, explaining loudly that he, too, was a relation. He turned to Nancy, saying, "Introduce me," while Mac realized how easy it must be to do murder, for Pat's ogle of admiration and immediate stream of somewhat fulsome compliments was overmarked.

"An' so here's the crack colt," said Pat, looking for some one to hold his horse, Mickey and Carty being suddenly stricken with deafness as he hailed them.

"Here, you Mickey" — Pat grew aggressive—"you're not poaching now. Don't hide in the nettles."

Mickey, catching Norman's eye, took the horse. "Isn't it a fine thing to give it up, Misther Maguire?" he said pleasantly, but with meaning in his eye. "'Tis grand whin ye rises out of it an' ye'll know what it is not to be trying to keep your feet from runnin' whin ye sees a peeler." And here Mickey, cherubic in his sweetness, led the mare across the yard and put her in a stable.

"An' so here's the crack," said Pat. "To win the world, I suppose? An' how are the chasers for next year here? Got any good ones, Mac?"

"P'r'aps," said Mac, breathing hard.

"I'll have some for the cups and one for the big flat race," boasted Pat. "One that'll beat that black colleen of yours, Norman, I tell you. After all, Mac," he lighted one of his dark cigars, "you've never had a good one since Little Colleen that you won the Moroney cup with, six years ago. It takes a lot of money, and judgment, too, to buy the right sort. But I've got them."

"Six years ago." Light gleamed in Mac's eyes. "Ye—es. Wasn't that the meeting, Maguire, when you got rather—er—tired, and went home in your Aunt Slattery's donkey-cart?"

Norman's burst of laughter and Shelia's stifled giggle rent the silence, while Pat Maguire turned purple. It was an episode in his life which he longed to bury for ever. An occasion of a cold March day, too many drinks in the tent, a period of hot desire to quarrel with the world, and a further period of desire to rest . . . anywhere . . . so much so, that he never knew that his mother's stepsister, finding him asleep, hoisted him into her cart, and, devoid of all thought of disgrace, drove him across before the country assembled to watch the last race. The self-complacency died out of Pat's red face, but his eyes grew venomous as they dwelt upon Mac.

"I'll—I'll pay you out for that," he muttered, under cover of a would-be careless laugh. He followed Uncle James into the stable, where he had gone to see the bay horse.

"An animal I should really like to own," said Uncle James in his gentle voice.

"Light-middled, curby-hocked brute," growled Pat Maguire. "Do you want a horse?"

Uncle James poured out his ideas fluently. He did want a horse—a good one—but the payment must be a delayed one—for a very short time. He thought this animal——

Pat looked through the door at the group outside. They were talking in low tones. Miss Slade, whom he had wished to impress, was laughing merrily—at him, no doubt.

He took Uncle James' plump arm, swiftly advancing a dozen reasons for never buying from Murrough Macnamara, and quite eighteen as to the suitability of a horse of his own. Red Boy—a roan—absolute perfection ; and for payment—a bill of three—six months—any time—a mere I O U. Mac could not wait, he could.

Having adjusted this little matter—for Uncle James believed him—Pat came out again, and the vow he registered against Mac was deep and bitter, while his eyes gleamed as Mac held forth about his colt.

“ I'll have him out in the spring,” babbled the owner, “ and he can't lose.”

“ There's many a slip,” quoted Pat darkly, some of the deeper channels of his mind commencing to move slowly. “ Many a one,” he repeated, his eyes upon Mac.

“ Oh, faith ! We're often carted on the day of a race,” said Mac innocently, and Miss Slade giggled aloud.

Pat's red face flushed to purple again ; he turned into a track among the nettles, meaning to call for his horse, but before he could speak that well-bred and outraged animal burst from its stall at a gallop, followed by a dark grey goat, which bent a wicked head as it pursued.

“ Catty ! ” cried Mac.

The bay mare sped through the weeds, clattered through the archway like a whirlwind, her master tearing behind her in impotent fury, having first hurled a sharp curse at his host.

"She'll stop at the swing gate," cried Shelia. "No—she's over it. Heavens! Pat's met Catty—I think she *just* missed him, for he's over too. They're off down the avenue."

"And it's four miles home," said Mac thoughtfully, watching the flying figure of Mr. Pat Maguire.

"He'll never forgive you, Mac," grinned Norman.

"No"—Shelia grew suddenly thoughtful—"he won't. Keep your stable door locked, Mac, or you'll never win a race with Forefront."

"But—I wonder," said Mac, turning, "how on earth Catty, the goat, got into the stable? She hates horses."

Mickey, wide-eyed and calm, appeared among the nettles.

"That was the quare sthert," he said thoughtfully. "Faix, Catty hit the mare a larrap that'll keep her goin' for a week." Mickey received his master's glance of open suspicion calmly.

"Stable doors—two of them—one to let the goat in, and one to let the horse out, don't open of themselves," said Norman, eyeing his gamekeeper.

"Thru for ye, sir," said Mickey placidly. "And the dusty road it is to back past Dunmore," he added pleasantly. "I'm thinkin' 'twould be no harrum to ride on and see Misther Maguire walkin' along on his feet."

Mickey, touching his cap, departed smiling. Norman and Mac, catching each other's eyes, burst into sudden laughter.

"Without the faintest doubt," said Mac drily. "He



had to bring Catty by a back way from her shed too. Bless him!" he added softly.

Uncle James' gently rounded voice broke in. "Ireland," he observed, "is a very curious place."

Mac, reverting to business, asked him if he would buy the chestnut and try her out, and Uncle James, with the princely air of a man who must have the best or nothing, said she was hardly good enough for him. "I want something more—er—blood-like," cooed Uncle James importantly.

"An' she clean bred," said Mac as the fat little man strolled to the archway to speak to Miss Jane. Here, as with his small hands weaving he was about to enlarge on the stamp of horse he wanted, it was unfortunate that Catty, much soured by futile chase, was returning to her house. The sight of the pair in the archway was too much for her. In a second her head bent wickedly, her deep-set eyes gleaming as she humped herself for the charge.

A roar of warning burst from Mac. Miss Jane took shelter behind Uncle James, who in turn whirled round her. They spun their cocoon of terror until the deadly horns were overnear, and Uncle James' eye lighted upon a rotting broken cart close to the gate. With the speed of Atalanta he reached and scaled it, while Aunt Jane, abandoned to her fate, followed him, too late to do anything except fly round and round it shrieking, the butting goat hot upon her trail.

Worse, Mr. Slade, whose gallantry led him weaponless to the rescue, found himself following her in the circle to escape Catty's onslaught, and breath was a thing of the past when Mac and Norman curbed their laughter to advance with shovel and broom, and force the goat to retire in high dudgeon across the yard.

"No one can say," observed Shelia, as she directed the chauffeur to get the car, "that an afternoon visit to Mac lacks incident."

They left Mac bathed in gloom, for the father-in-law he longed for was now short of temper, driving his daughter forth without any time for tender adieus.

As Shelia's car sped through the soft evening they passed, about halfway to Dunmore, the perspiring and thunderous figure of Mr. Pat Maguire, walking rapidly homewards; his sulky silence unbroken by the kindly offer of the seat which they would have given him had there been room (for Norman had left his bicycle, directing Mac to ride it over). The afternoon had gone hardly for the claimant of half Shelia's fortune.

Dusk fell as they reached the square white house, nestling among its sheltering woods. Lights gleamed in the windows, welcoming them back. Standing outside, Shelia looked into her own cosy room, more a man's than a woman's in its simple comforts—deep easy chairs, pleasantly untidy tables—showing in the clear white glow of the reading-lamps. And Shelia looking, sighed deeply. Above her, Aunt Jane's shrill voice was rating Maria for some lack of order in her arrangement of her bedroom.

"My shoes left out in the dust!" harangued Aunt Jane. "And a dress hung up so as to ruin it!"

Maria's aggrieved answer that she must be helping to get dinner was full of rancour, and Shelia moved along the grass to the window of the library. Here she could hear Norman's uncle musically demanding a sherry-and-bitters in the dining-room, and directing Peter, the youth who sometimes imagined himself a

butler, as to the exact temperature of the old claret which Uncle James wished to have at dinner.

Shelia sighed again, looking in at the library window. It was a deep, square room, the walls lined with books—old leather-bound volumes which Shelia had never looked at—others, whole and valuable editions of Scott and Thackeray and Lever and Surtees, and little of anything modern, for Shelia's outdoor life gave her scant time for reading. The windows of this room were not French; she leant her arms upon the sill, peering in. There was the round table at which her grandfather had been found dead, the very chair which he sat in drawn up to it. If she could but conjure now, and see where he had put the deed which meant so much to them; see the old man as he wrote his last words, feeling himself too weak to call for help.

"If—if—if——" Shelia shook herself as if she had been one of her own retrievers emerging from the lake, and turned to meet Norman, who was coming to look for her.

"If—if——" There would be no nightmare of curtailed income, no aggressive Pat living next door to them on lands which had once belonged to Dunmore.

"That old pair," said Norman gravely, "are the dickens of a nuisance. And Mickey"—he bubbled with mirth with the ease of a careless nature—"I found Mickey in the yard, shamelessly recounting how he brought Catty along, and the grandest sight he saw for years was Mither Pat, and he dressed like a theayter, tramping along the dusty road with black murther in his eyes. Indeed, all he had to wish for was that Catty struck thim both harder."

Shelia, taking her husband's hand in hers, wished the world was full of Mickeys.

## CHAPTER V

## HOW AUNT JANE SAW CUB-HUNTING

“ In other men we faults espy,  
And blame the mote that dims our eye.”—*Gray*.

SEPTEMBER held out cool fingers to looming October, then sprang away with so mocking a curtsey that October, taunted by the gibe, slipped off his sombre cloak and stood forth in bravery of crimson and sunset and gold. He came softly as a wooing wind, with light frosts crisping the early mornings, and clear blue skies, and light sun, and coolness of still sweet air.

Blackberries purpled amid their dying leaves, a second summer seemed for a space to warm the earth. Horses pranced on the dewy turf, snorting and plunging in their joy of life and strength. Great backs humped, long tails swishing, yet no thought of harm in their loyal kindly hearts.

Let them play, was old Tom's motto, as he not unfrequently picked up sundry remnants of his stable boys and remounted them, with much reproof, upon the horse which had thrown them. “ Bate for vice, but never for fun,” he said firmly. “ Take him a coorse round the green, gossoon, and stick your knees into him.”

Then came something which upset all plans and projects at Dunmore. Hounds came to rattle the fat cubs in the woods. The house hummed from five o'clock, and Aunt Jane, in a sour early-morning temper, crept forth to see them.

Uncle James already talked of his hunting, and had taken some rides, poised insecurely on the oldest

hunter in the place. He lurched a great deal, with a strong disposition to go to the right when his horse went to the left, and his hands, Mickey said, "as if he ever had the hankercher up to tind to his nose." But he treated it all lightly, speaking grandly of his past days in the saddle, and looking with complete scorn on the idea of any difficulty in managing horses or riding to hounds.

Miss Jane, many years younger, had never dreamt of trying to ride again, but as she followed on the damp path in the cool morning and heard the rustle of hounds about her, her eyes sparkled, a strange tingling moved her to her finger-tips.

Walking on, she saw something steal across, a small red thing bobbing uncertainly, then hot upon him, breaking into a chorus of deep notes, leaps the pack, thundering down the path. Then master and whips, and Shelia, her fair face alight, holding her grey horse hard. The last one of all, little Desmond, beating his pony and abusing the groom with the leading rein. The madness of hunting was in the air.

It surely could not have been Aunt Jane, prim and captious, who burst from the lower end of the woods, her hat gone, trails of brambles festooned across her skirt, out in time to meet the pack as they swung in again, and to see once more the bewildered frightened cub. By breakfast time Aunt Jane's skirt was in ribbons, and she could run no more; but as she watched the hounds trot towards the house, a little head now hanging upon Jack's saddle, the subtle poison had turned her thin blood redder. She must hunt—must at least come out to see—dash on one of those splendid straining horses down the wide rides and across the fields. Uncle James, serenely ready for

early breakfast and a talk with the men, had watched what portions of the chase he could from his bedroom window, in an exceedingly bad humour, for no servant could be found to bring him his coffee. But Miss Jane sat panting in her room, with no breath to scold Maria, and the wild longing for a horse pouring through her brain. Uncle James had ordered a pink coat from Norman's tailor, and talked musically at breakfast of how an old man could not resist the fun, but must be forgiven if he had forgotten all his old experience.

Aunt Jane stepped to the yard and went for a ride on Shelia's fat pony, managing it with some skill. She whispered her desire to her niece, who merely smiled.

Her two pounds, to Shelia's great embarrassment, were paid in regularly on Wednesday mornings; but Uncle James confined himself to talking pleasantly of the great cheque he meant to write in the spring.

"A nicer way, my boy," he said to Norman. "Something to make life easy to you for a bit."

In the meantime he unfortunately developed a taste for the companionship of Shelia's cousin Pat—took to strolling down to the post office at an hour when he knew he would meet Pat flirting with the pretty girl in the shop.

At these times Uncle James generally had a letter to post, and was short of money for a postal order or for stamps. Sometimes one sum and sometimes another, unaccountably dropped or forgotten—Pat making up the difficulties with a lordly carelessness, and "there's more where those come from, I tell you," as he pulled out loose handfuls of silver.

Bitten by the desire to enjoy himself, the old gentleman talked of the horse which he must buy, and listened, his eyes growing greedy, when Pat whispered of a grey



which he knew of, which must in the spring fetch double its present price. It belonged, it appeared, to a fool of an honest little dealer called Meleady, a small simpleton of a fellow that had no idea of this treasure's value. And if Mr. James Rivers chose to keep quiet and not breathe a word to Norman, Pat would drive him over there himself and make the deal.

"The one I thought would do of my own is too light-hearted for you," said Pat. "I saw you riding the other day, and a young horse isn't your stamp; but here we have a real chance. None of Mr. Murrough Mac's whistling cast-offs—or Shelia's fired beauties, but a treasure."

Uncle James, with the audacity which induces the world to go on paying for tipsters' final certainties without pausing to remember that with such perfect information any tipster might retire a millionaire without troubling to collect half-crowns from foolish men and women . . . Uncle James listened and was filled with eagerness. His silence was so impatient that he snorted that night at dinner before every word he spoke. Next day, a light October morning found him stealthily joining Pat at the end of the village and driving rapidly along narrow by-ways until they turned down a bumping lane and in at a narrow gateway.

"Norman," Pat explained with enjoyment, "would eat his uncle's face off if he knew what they were up to, so the meeting must be spoken of, at all costs, as accidental."

That small simpleton, Meleady, was slandered by a singularly astute expression, and naturally shifty blue eyes meeting your glance with trained steadiness and good fellowship.

He said he had received Pat's message, but the grey

horse—the blue eyes took a crystal clarity of sadness—he was as good as promised to an officer in Cahervally, who ought to have been over about him to-day. Look at him? Oh, of course they could do that same, an' a takin' horse he was, too, but rough and uncared; a poor little chap like himself had no ways of maintainin' them. He opened a stable door and stripped clean rugs from a grey horse, which was fat as butter and polished like a mirror. In this condition the horse was undoubtedly taking—an iron-grey, with straight forelegs, doubtful hocks, and an ill-tempered, Roman-nosed head. But he carried himself admirably, and his round trapper's action when he was taken out won Uncle James' heart.

Meleady, a consummate horseman, cantered the grey about, the reins flapping loosely as the horse seemed to twist and turn at the merest touch. He jumped a small stone wall and bank cleverly, though the buck over the latter made Uncle James full of thought as to where he would have been when they landed. With some trepidation Mr. Rivers hoisted his own plump little form into the saddle, and proceeded to trot gingerly about; Greyboy going easily and quietly as his rider flopped up and down, chirruping strange noises of encouragement to his mount. The round roadster action was disconcerting to a novice.

The conversation between Pat and the simple Meleady would have astonished the would-be purchaser.

"We have him cot," said the horse dealer, with a twisted smile.

"We have so," returned Pat, lapsing into broad Irish. "An' now the mane and tail's whipped from the horse not a soul will know him. 'Tis a great chance."

" 'Tis to get double the brute's vally," grunted Meleady. " Four mortal hours I had him out to-day. But I tell ye all the time I don't like it, Pat. The man's ould, an' he's for all the world like a sack of yally male above on a horse. I wouldn't do it meself. Loose his head," he screamed suddenly and anxiously, watching Uncle James amble past. " He's that soft of his mouth he takes it hardly if ye pulls at him."

The little man, who had begun to use the reins to balance himself by as he essayed a canter, loosed them hastily. The grey was already tossing his head and snatching mulishly at his bits.

After a cautious canter and a day dream as to his own appearance in a pink coat at the first meet, Uncle James had made up his mind the grey horse should be his. He took another amble, Meleady urging him to jump the grey over something before he got off. Uncle James looked doubtfully at the bank, compromised by taking two stones which had rolled from the wall, and then, being helped to earth, admired Greyboy at all sides. He asked Pat if the man understood that he had to wait for the money, and Pat having replied that he had arranged all that, he looked upon the horse as his own.

Meleady, candid-eyed, was still doubtful. The captain would be sorely disappointed ; he really couldn't see his way. Yet he allowed, by degrees, the flood of Pat's persuasive eloquence to shake his decision, until he finally wrung Mr. Rivers' hand with a force which caused that little gentleman to dance from pain, and said the horse should be his.

" A hundred and twenty pound," said Meleady genially. " It's not every day of the week ye'd see that sthamp of a horse goin' for the same price."

Which was solid truth, as half would have been too

much. "A blood hunter, warranted sound. You should snap at it," whispered Pat.

Wasted eloquence—Uncle James was only too eager. "I was prepared to give more," he said grandly, "for I must have a good animal. Oh, an I O U, of course—Mr. Maguire will sign also."

"One for me and twenty for yerself," whispered Pat.

They went into a stuffy parlour, with windows which had never been opened, and a smell of stale porter, whisky, and tobacco clinging to everything. A stout handmaiden brought a tray laden with decanter and thick glasses, flanked by a plate of hard, sugary biscuits; and Meleady, pouring in about two glasses of fiery whisky, and holding the water-jug for a second over the spirit, so that a drop or two escaped, insisted on Uncle James drinking to the bargain, his cough and gulp as he tasted being almost tragic in their surprise. After this the well-written signature of Mr. James Rivers, and the sprawling superscription of Pat Maguire, were appended to a document which swam before the little Englishman's eyes, and the friendly wink which passed between the two who had sold him the horse was quite lost upon him.

He bargained for a day or two to make arrangements, then went out with an ill-tempered feeling that all the world had suddenly combined to annoy him, and that some unknown god was shaking and lowering the grey clouds upon his head. Pat Maguire, putting the paper in his pocket-book, said to Meleady they were well in it for once.

But in this, as in many other decisions, he had to learn that man is ever liable to err.

When Uncle James returned to Dunmore he was greeted by the scowls of Mickey and Hannah Anne.

He passed the gate where that portly young woman was airing some clothes and several children in her back yard ; but she whisked to the front to see Norman's uncle.

"Down day after day, pleasant as be damned, with that robber Pat Maguire," whispered Mickey fiercely. "There's meself that'll hardly ask me finger to soil me cap for him. Miss Shelia, with her face as hard as a ripe nut, and high as the moon to him. There's that same little man friendly no less. Didn't I get little Thady to watch there to-day ? Off together to buy a horse."

Here Hannah bewailed the happier days when Norman had hunted from Cahervally, and Mickey, choking with emotion, started off to tell his beloved master.

Uncle James broke the news of his purchase at lunch, with an airy carelessness, as he ate mutton chops languidly. To begin, they were not well cooked ; but, as Maria told the young cook, that was no reason to hang over them for all the world like the vinegar dropping to the "mayonnaisey dressin' that Kate used to make."

"One must, I think, hunt here," said Uncle James, calling sadly for cold meat. "It is in the air. And I—Norman, my boy—I have been tempted and fallen. I was at a horse dealer's called Meleady to-day, and purchased a horse."

"Without—Shelia," exploded Norman in astonishment.

"Shelia"—Uncle James, arranging a small store of bottles before him, compounded a dressing for his salad—"Shelia is a lady." He smiled with gentle contempt. "I would, of course, have consulted you, but the horse would have been gone had I waited."

"They've a way of doing that—off Meleady's tongue"

observed Norman drily. "And Shelia—Shelia's about the best judge in this country; she would have kept you clear of ordinary cheating, anyhow."

Uncle James' expression was as cunning as the mixture of oil and vinegar and cream which he poured over his green lettuce. Had not Pat warned him that they would be annoyed?

"As regards your keeping the animal, Norman," he went on, "shall there be a fixed sum, or shall I buy oats and so forth—perhaps the latter. I presume horses do not consume very much."

The matter, as most monetary arrangements of Mr. James Rivers, remained in abeyance; but Miss Jane, leading him aside when lunch was over, questioned him eagerly.

So much better, he told her, to go to a regular horse dealer with a reputation to keep up, than to buy some useless thing from private stables—something people wished to get rid of. In low tones Uncle James suggested taking out the pony trap and driving Aunt Jane forth to Meleady's to buy yet another horse. Miss Brown was far from uncomely, and the mysterious mines allured the little bachelor not a little. Liberty was dear, but single ladies possessing valuable shares were useful friends. So Uncle James made himself vastly agreeable, and they united in sweet and bitter abuse of the house-keeping and the cooking.

Shelia, her face a little clouded, joined them, young Desmond by her side.

"And your horse, Aunt Jane?" she asked abruptly. "If you mean to come out, better let me help you."

Mr. Rivers' side glance was full of eloquence.

"There's the bay," said Shelia slowly; "he's going to the fair, and he'd stand light work for ever. I'd



let you have him, Aunt, for fifty pounds. He's the quietest thing, and you're so light."

Her tone dropped into indecisive sadness; she knew the horse was worth more, yet wished to do her sour relative a kindness. It was a species of moral whipping to her own perpetual resentment of her aunt's presence—her weariness at perpetual grumbling and wrangling with the patient servants. Aunt Jane shied from a painful grudge, returned James Rivers' meaning glance, and said primly that she thought it would be better for her to wait and not take one of her niece's. "You mean that pretty one with the fired hind hocks," said Miss Jane, visibly proud of acquired knowledge. "I really think, my dear, one without hereditary weakness of limb, and subsequent operation to cure, would suit me better."

Norman, who was listening, immediately fell over the mowing machine and drowned his yell in the clatter, while Shelia's crimson hue and uncertain glance confirmed the pair in the certainty of their wisdom.

The young people's hasty retreat left them alone to say so in pleased tones.

"You see"—Uncle James lighted one of Norman's cigarettes; his own were always delayed in the post—"you see, they were about to foist some wretched animal upon you. Shelia's confusion was really too marked."

Peals of laughter rose from behind the rose walk, together with some audible remonstrance concerning using mowing machines as refuges. The arrival of Mac brought Shelia and Norman, very pink as to complexion, back again—fetched by their son—who explained overloudly that Mummie had run away because of something Aunt Jane said about Robin's hind legs.

"And, pleasure first," said Mac. "Douglas Hilyard wrote to me for horses. I can get eighty pounds for you for Robin, if you'd take so little." Miss Jane gasped a little, and yet was unconvinced. The suspiciousness in her narrow mind immediately determined that Mac was in the plot.

"And business next," said Mac gloomily, drawing them aside. "Oh, don't stare down the avenue, Shelia. I came over unexpectedly. There are one or two fellows showing teeth, inclined to be nasty. I can't tell why; and I may want you to take Forefront for a bit. If it's a put-up thing to pay off some grudge, they might collar him. He's not too well off these days; the new boy doesn't seem to agree with him."

Shelia beat her long, slim hand against a branch.

"Come lately?" she queried.

"A fortnight."

"From whom?"

"Left Maguire here—quarrelled with him, but had a good character."

"H'm." Shelia stared. "Pack him off, Mac. I don't think a certain cousin forgives easily, and you got him on a sore spot about his day at the races."

"Shelia's hit it," observed Norman, with the warm appreciation of his wife's intelligence which he had never lost.

Murrough Macnamara dropped into sudden thoughtfulness.

"He might be a bad enemy," he observed. "Faith, yes—worse than I am to myself." He laughed mirthlessly. "And here he is," he added, pointing down the avenue, "flanked by his precious sisters."

"What—what can I do to prevent them coming here?" cried Shelia, with unusual weakness for her.

Mac suggested eagerly her leaving it to him and Mickey, but found his remark coldly put outside. Norman—men are ever helpful—could only think of his rifle, so Shelia, with head up, called them both fools and sat down, stonily resigned.

The Misses Cassidy represented the latest thing in Directoire fashions, and represented them untidily; their short waists were a study in abbreviation, vanishing beneath the hem of enormous hats, and they even carried beribboned canes, which they swung jauntily.

Their greeting to plainly garbed Shelia almost savoured of pity.

"Party near here?" queried Mac softly as he bent over the tightly gloved hands.

"Party?" said Rosie. "What d'ye mean, Mr. Macnamara?"

Mac explained humbly how the glory of their costumes had seemed to him quite beyond an ordinary afternoon call; and having succeeded in making them uncomfortable, he turned his attention to Pat—the malignity of that gentleman's eyes making him suddenly thoughtful.

"How's Forefront, Mac?" queried Mr. Maguire suddenly.

"Most extraordinarily well," said Mac, lying serenely. "Never saw a horse so fit. That boy you sacked is a treasure, Maguire. Tom leaves everything to him."

Pat grunted heavily; his greeting to Mr. James Rivers was so careless that no one could have imagined they had spent the morning together.

"We came over," he explained. "I'll be away, and the girls want to go to the afternoon at Banack's. They came to ask you to take them, Shelia."

Shelia's fair skin bloomed to brilliant pink. Surprise left her no hope of escape.

"Oh, what a pity you're lunching with the Slades and going with them," said Mac smoothly. "Bad luck that."

Shelia recovered with a gasp, a glance of joy. Yes, she was exceedingly sorry. It was unfortunate that she was engaged. And then as the girls sulked openly, and Pat looked evilly upon the pale and innocent countenance of Mr. Murrough Macnamara, Uncle James' round voice broke sweetly in.

But—they were all asked, and he wished to go. He had not heard before of dear Shelia's deserting them. So why not come with Miss Brown and an old man? Dearest Shelia would leave them the carriage and meet them there. Such a delightful arrangement.

The *sotto voce* remark from Mac was that there was nothing for it save death in the house or family, and he looked at Pat, but there was no mirth left in Shelia. Her smooth acceptance was without reproach.

"Only as the carriage is away mending you'll have to go on a car," said Mac thoughtfully. "The day after to-morrow, isn't it—yes." He stared hopefully at the clouds.

Shelia's eyes were upon the powdered faces, the be-frizzled heads, the wondrous plumes and ribbons of the two ladies who would meet her at the afternoon dance. They revived into happy giggles when their trip, under her charge, was assured. Life was a realized dream when they could ask a partner to go back to their chaperon, Mrs. Rivers. Shelia, who would be among the people whom they only knew by sight, the borrowed radiance of her position upon them for the day.

The situation, strained to breaking point, was broken

by the appearance upon the avenue of a grey horse, led by a man on a small pony, and attended by Mickey. He advanced as close to the group as he could, announcing that he had the horse from Mr. Meleady that the sthout little old gentleman bought.

Uncle James, stung by this astuteness of description, rose to his feet, explaining volubly that he had particularly ordered Meleady to keep the animal for some days, that its being sent over so quickly was not intended and so forth; but Meleady's man in reply merely said he knew the way to the yard, and gazed at Uncle James with an eye which was thirsty for silver.

Norman, Shelia, and Mac advanced together upon the grey, taking his bridle and twisting him about in the horribly critical and disparaging manner which sellers learn to know and dread. Out there, alone against the background of bright sky and dull trees, the grey looked smaller and meaner. He was a woodenish horse, the straightness of his forelegs was more apparent, and his hocks were carried as if they were things he had no use for.

A gentle chorus picking out his faults played upon him as he laid back sulky ears and turned the whites of his eyes upon his critics.

But the pride of ownership flowed strong in Uncle James' heart, as he left the room and joined them.

"A difficult animal to pick a fault in," he said airily.

Mac, with the kind candour of friendship, said it was. Because one would be jealous of the other if you started making a choice. He chewed the end of an elm twig gravely as his eyes seemed to search for something he missed.

"But he's not a bad sort of slave," he said cheerily, catching Uncle James' offended eye, "not at all. Come



out two days a week and lie on you when he's tired—so as to be ready for the next day. I suppose, now, that ruffian Meleady made you pay sixty for him, bad hocks and all."

Mr. James Rivers' gasp was as that of the trout suddenly riven from his watery home. He wheeled in too open a manner upon Pat Maguire, who looked distinctly ill at ease; but a whisper of "jealousy," in a careful undertone, cleared the little gentleman's brow.

In sugary tones, he feared Mr. Macnamara was a bad judge of a hunter's value.

Mac, still staring, retorted gently that he might be, but at present he was only putting a price on this grey, so that was no guide, and then his eyes cleared.

"He's the image . . . now I've got it! The image of that grey bolter with the lame hind leg that you came out on a few times," said Mac, turning swiftly to Pat.

But Greek met Greek imperturbably. "Is he, now?" said Pat. "They were both grey, to be sure, Macnamara."

Shelia nodded her head sharply. She too had felt sure she had seen the horse before.

"The brute you scattered the pack on at Kildullen," she said. "I remember. He was better bred looking, wasn't he?"

"Scissors and knife can soon rip off a lot of would-be quality," observed Mac. "I don't believe two horses could have such sour heads. I ought to know, for didn't I see it coming straight at me when I was knocked endways in Clancy's bog? And here's the place they blistered his hock."

"But as Misther Maguire tuk Misther Rivers to buy him, he must be sure 't isn't his own horse," broke in



Mickey as he delicately felt a large splint, and watched Uncle James grow pink, and Pat Maguire scowl.

Norman, eyeing his relative anxiously, directed the grey horse's removal. Stiff good-byes were exchanged when Shelia's cousins left, the young women joyously alluding to their appearance at the dance; and then Norman, his hands in his pockets, rated Uncle James with critical and accusing eyes.

"Shelia's judgment would at least have saved you some money," he said drily. "You would find that brute difficult to sell."

Uncle James, colouring rosily, said with a snort that they would tell that in the spring; and Mac, lighting a pipe, observed that if it was Pat's old grey no one who rode him need bother about the spring, for they would be dead long before that. Whereupon Uncle James, borrowing half a crown from Pat to give to the groom, followed his grey into the yard. The jesting reference to so solemn a subject bringing a hail of remonstrance from Miss Jane, who was one of the many who regard death as a fierce wild animal, to be kept long at bay with buns composed of mock respect, instead of a quiet, sad certainty, coming in time for all.

"Sacred subjects," declared Miss Jane, "should be treated with gravity. Only yesterday had she questioned Desmond as to hell, and he told her it was a place daddy sent idle grooms to, or vets that didn't pass horses; while as to heaven the child seemed really to imagine it was somewhere in a good fox-hunt. And when she explained, at length"—Aunt Jane snorted—"the child said daddie and mummie knew best, and went off to spoil his clothes in the lake."

Here Shelia declared she would not have the boy taught the fire and brimstone side of religion, and

Mac said he wasn't sure Desmond hadn't found the true place of punishment for a sportsman's spirit. And for the other—Mac had one of his bursts of eloquence—"What happiness touches it? It's a joy without touch of pain or bitterness—pure enjoyment—glorious sympathy with the four-legged pal which carries us; straining every nerve in his body, using brain and eye and gallant heart to keep his place."

"And the fox?" said Miss Jane sourly. "The poor fox?"

"It gives him his right to be alive," said Shelia. "If we didn't hunt him he wouldn't have any snug gorse homes or be preserved in great woodlands, but be shot, and poisoned, and trapped, until he was as extinct as a dodo."

"You see, we might fail if we had to speak in Parliament," said Mac pleasantly. "But our tongues run like spring tides when it comes to defending fox-hunting. No, I won't stay to dinner, Shelia, because I am going back to lock Forefront's stable, and send away Master Mike Henessy with a suggestion that he returns to Clonmony. I—I can't afford to trifle with that colt's chances," said Mac, growing grave as he bade them good-bye and rode rapidly away.

"A most irreligious and impertinent young man," said Aunt Jane acidly, her thin little face set in bitter dislike. "I cannot understand how Mr. Slade can encourage him as a suitor for his daughter."

"He doesn't," said Shelia briefly. "I'm afraid I'm the only one who does that."

Miss Jane's nose grew sharp as a terrier's which smells rats. She looked down the avenue sourly, and the mental memento which she took down was not one likely to further Murrough Macnamara's love affairs. His

tongue was too ready for her ; he had an easy way of sliding from verbal corners she pinned him into and suddenly appearing safely in the middle of the room with a merry grin on his face. He was never impressed, and he saw too clearly. But—Aunt Jane's wits were sharp—other people might listen, and Mr. Slade, successful business man, might be one of them.

Uncle James, returning from the novelty of looking into a stable which contained his very own horse, found the thin little woman musing, her pointed chin in her hand. He raised the sluice-gates of confidence by inquiring if that young pup Macnamara had left. The whip of Mac's shrewd tongue had penetrated through Uncle James' cloak of self-esteem, so the two spent a happy ten minutes, during which, in vinegary treble and rounded baritone, they rent, and picked, and smote at the absent youth's character, and decided with the easy callousness of middle age that the match between him and the rich Miss Slade would be most unsuitable.

" I," said Miss Jane, " will just give a word of warning at that dance. Just a hint that this house is used as a meeting-place, and then Mr. Slade can act as he chooses."

" At the afternoon—yes." Uncle James smiled. " I could not see those two pretty girls disappointed by Mr. Macnamara's ready lie. So I—I fear I did not please by the arrangement——"

With uplifted hands Aunt Jane applauded him. It was narrow-minded of Shelia to bear malice because by right of law certain sums of money must go to these people. Money, or its want, spoilt everything.

Uncle James, sighing now, said that at least his cheque in the spring would put things right, though

now he was hard pressed. Miss Jane was lucky to have her money in—which mines?

Miss Jane was confused as to the exact names, which she had, of course, records of—Smithson Deeps, or Ratfouten Gold, or something like that—and Uncle James, as he studied the *Financial Times* that evening, saw that none of the names were exactly right. His own foreign railways, he said, were soaring, it appeared, to fortune. A few months would see him a very rich man. He discussed motors and yachts, and large studs of hunters with the fluency of certainty.

Then, it being post time, he borrowed a shilling from Aunt Jane, gave a letter to the postman, who, having wasted all his time dallying with Maria, had now some faint hopes of reaching the village before the train left.

"If the Lord'd keep the ould patch on me hind tyre, I'd do it yet," he told Miss Jane. "Thim trains is so full of thimselves an' their time-tables there's no depindin' on them. 'Twasn't like the ould mail cyars, that could always raise a gallop to make up a delay." Here he departed, spurred by Miss Jane's shrill displeasure and threat of report, but his hasty descent a short way down the avenue seemed to point to lack of divine care of the patch, and a certainty of a day's delay of the out-going letters.

Murrough Macnamara, whistling gaily as he saw his old man feed Forefront himself and then lock the stable, passed through tangle of nettle and thistle, past the blistered, peeling walls of the home which his imagination already saw painted and plastered, and gave no thought to the three enemies which in the last few days he had managed to acquire.

A lean little woman, opening her window at Dunmore, looked down at the woods and dark masses in the

dimness, where she had seen the hounds hunt, heard their blood-stirring notes. She could feel still the rush and thunder of the horses as she shrank aside to let them pass.

"I must come out if I'm not too old," whispered Aunt Jane to the night.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW UNCLE JAMES BOUGHT AUNT JANE A HORSE

"There's the measured stroke on elastic sward,  
Of the steed three parts extended."—*Gordon*.

It is a joy to see some horses move, and Forefront, Mac's three-year-old, was one of them. Shelia and Norman, anxious about the youngster's health, rode over next morning, and arrived in time to see a trial between the bay and Blackthorn, a five-year-old, who had proved himself smart in the best of company.

The silver lightness of frost still lay upon the grass as they cantered up to Castle Granagh. The crisp freshness of autumn stirred the horses' blood, so that Shelia's black pranced and bucked as if he was four instead of twelve, and Norman's four-year-old bucked from sheer joy of life and youth.

They came panting on to the unkempt gravel to find Mac just bringing out the horses.

Forefront was not quite fit, he told them, but having arranged the gallop it must stand, so he swung his spare, active form into the saddle.

Blackthorn was smart, but he met his match that morning. Going greenly, with no knowledge yet of how to use his great pace, yet the bay colt swept on with level, sweeping strides, all his heart in his work,



fighting for his bit as he went, snuffing the keen air through open nostrils.

"Now," said Mac, and Blackthorn forged ahead, hard-driven; but Forefront only waited for his question. As Mac's knees gripped tight and his strain on the bit relaxed, the youngster stretched out with giant, powerful strides, until Blackthorn's head dropped from shoulder to girth, and girth to quarter, and then lay far astern as Forefront, untired, was with difficulty pulled up.

What Blackthorn's jockey said as he tumbled off was "for the love of God Almighty to keep a still tongue, so as to get a price," his eager chatter drowning the quiet words which Mac muttered into his horse's silky mane.

"We'll loose him for the two miles at Sheeragh in March, just after the meeting here, and then at Punchestown. If I've the luck of a mouse I'll keep him on and win a National with him. Take him away, Tom—carefully."

Carefully, for, dark with sweat, snorting as he went, picking his steps across the long grass, the bay colt represented many things.

The re-roofing of the decrepit old house, new paint upon its walls, flowers blooming in the disused beds, the presence of a certain bright-faced girl about the place.

Should Forefront—a pearl among colts—remain sound and uninjured, this future seemed assured. Untried as yet, he had now proved himself. No mere dream, but a horse of no ordinary stamp—a stayer, and fast, and, as they knew, a clever fencer.

"But as Mat Halsey says, God Almighty keep our tongues quiet," said Mac as he took them up to the house to drink tea and eat hunches of hot soda bread. "No one knew of this to-day, and I want them to go



on thinking I'm dreaming about him, as I've done about so many."

But had Mac seen his lately discharged boy slipping down from a tree under which he had slept all night, and speeding across the fields to interview Mr. Pat Maguire, he would not have been so certain of secrecy. The youth's subsequent description of an animal which appeared to have sped so fast that the wind was distanced, and the naked eye could not follow, sending Pat in to his breakfast of boiled eggs and cold boiled bacon in an irritated and thoughtful state of mind.

He thrust his face out of the window after his second egg. "And how far was the other horse behind, did you say?" he shouted to the waiting boy.

"Half a mile," said the youth cheerfully.

"Damn you," remarked Pat, retreating for more food. His sisters, since prosperity had descended on them, were late risers, and his mother was at Mass, whither she betook herself at early hours so that her daughters' magnificent costumes and presences might not be darkened by this blot on their pedigree.

Mrs. Tom confining herself at this time to effacing her presence by hurried exits whenever her daughters' new friends arrived, and letting her bitter and exultant tongue loose when she drove on the new outside car to Cahervally and shopped to her heart's content. There were long lists against her now in the fat dirty ledgers. Credit is too grand a thing to ask questions, and the late cook took what she was given without comment, though at home she ranted angrily against "thievin' vilyins."

She had been happier in the kitchen at Clonmony, or the little stuffy back parlour behind the dining-room, than in the big square drawing-room which was

furnished in spasms, as Violet and Rosie were impressed by each new room they saw.

Shelia's was all in chintz, so two new chairs, a-sprawl with pink roses, were speedily imported; but ere the room could be completed, they returned a call at Mrs. Royce's, to see there the richer tints of tapestry. This resulted in a couch from London, with Watteau shepherdesses in affectionate groups, and a severe scolding from Mrs. Tom when she caught sight of the bill. Delane's had been ransacked for more when they were asked to an afternoon by the wife of Colonel Hilyard, to see stiff suites in modern Sheraton, covered in blue brocade. An irruption of cheap spindle legs followed this, so that the room was filled to overflowing in its jostle to be fashionable, with half a dozen colours warring bitterly, a medley of fat beribboned cushions shouldering crochet antimacassars worked at the convent—cheap prints in gaudy frames lowering at inefficient water-colours, and a general air of unrest over everything. A scowling hint shown by chintz and tapestry and brocade that they were not accustomed to be sat upon.

Violet and Rosie did it timidly upon extreme edges when they received their occasional callers, and poured out tea from the thick plated teapot, grating on a dirty brass tray. Credit was long and anticipation was glorious, yet Mrs. Tom, as she stalked homewards that morning, looked up at the square white house wondering suddenly if she had not been far happier in the rambling thatched cottage at the foot of the hills. Then Pat had been openly a horse-coper and poacher, with no veneer of gentility flaking from the rough surface beneath. There she had scolded and raged and economized as she chose, and carved American

bacon, helped reeking cabbage in a shabby, airless sitting-room, with nothing to follow except hot tea and soda loaf—and seen it go, as Pat lighted his pipe, with warnings to the clumping maid that “they had it measured, so as to be sure to give no slice to Mickey for his tea.” Then she had looked forward to marrying Rosie and Violet to prosperous young farmers—Mrs. Tom had saved a little. They would hardly say good-morning to these men now.

Her savings had been discovered and recklessly spent ; they were so little in comparison to the great sum they must receive.

Here Mrs. Tom was not allowed to rage at the be-capped servants lest they should leave. She must see unheard-of luxuries, which made her ill, flanked by fiery port and cheap sherry at half-past one—what she called a nonsensical bite of tea—and later another meal, such as she had cooked in days gone by, supplemented by “ongtrays” and creams and dessert, when officers were persuaded to dine. Pat, creaking in a stiffly boiled shirt, the girls all silks and bare, be-beaded necks, and Mrs. Tom afraid to speak lest her uncouth tongue should give her away.

Mrs. Tom had just said her prayers, and the influence of the bare, quiet chapel was still upon her.

“The ould man left us enough, and maybe on account of me we’re never meant to have more,” she muttered as she strode up the avenue in time to hear Pat graciously flinging damns at the waiting boy.

She brought the post, gladly given up by Maria’s lover, with her. The contents of one smudged epistle, which she handed to Pat, seemed to give her son much pleasure. He chuckled as he read it, while his mother patiently drank chilled tea and ate cold bacon. The

girls, she heard, had sent word they were "sleeping it out" and would be down perhaps in an hour.

"I wish 'twas all over and the money paid to us," said Mrs. Tom as she opened her own correspondence. "There's bills as long as the Caher from every shop in the town, and the hearing put back and back every time."

Pat, lifting his head, said that shops were made to wait, and he thought he'd made enough over the letter he held to pay all the brutes a bit. "Let me at them," said Pat darkly, "I'll settle them." He went out to see Andy, his worthy groom, and he went hurriedly as one who bears great news.

But his mother, who had never owed money until prosperity loomed before her, sighed.

In the meantime, while Shelia and her husband lingered at Castle Granagh, their Aunt Jane and Uncle James breakfasted together with a running accompaniment of suggestion and comment to Maria and Peter. Bacon should be crisp and hot—hotness being a *raison d'être* in the world. The cook had just spoilt the eggs. The pears Uncle James had sent for . . . some were quite ill-chosen. He pointed out certain specks and spots upon their mottled sides.

"As if Stephen'd pick the besht for them two," said Peter wrathfully to Maria. "I declare betune clar't, an' bitthers and sherry wine, and hot whisky punch to bed with him, and port wine when he's finished atin' and agin at twelve, he has the masther dhrunk out of the house an' home. Didn't I bring the wrong wine yestherday, thinkin' to save, and the face he med was for all the world like one of thim ould sthone gurgles the missus fixed up on the house. 'And what did *you* do to this, me boy?' he says. 'Kindly bring me a bottle carefully,' says he, 'an' I'll descant it meself

and kape the key of the little locker I puts it in,' says he. So that's all the good I got, that he can run to it whin he chooses."

"An' herself with me up at six," grumbled Maria. "If it wasn't for the poor young missus we'd lave others to wait on them, I tell ye. D'ye hear the bell now pealin'? There's one thing"—she walked away with deliberation—"they can't whip the tongue out of ye mouth, or disbelave ye entirely."

Her gentle excuse five minutes later as to Peter's absence on a message, and her own occupation with bedrooms, was without reproach. She took the doubt cast upon the quality of the tea with placidity. "Chaney tay it was, indeed, for they might feel sure that no sensible person'd care to be dhrinkin' the shmoky kind of stuff. So far as makin' fresh, the kittle was off the bile, an' the fire slaked; but if they'd wait till she filled an Etna lamp, she'd make some, an' welcome."

Having observed the retreat of her annoyed enemies, Maria smiled as she descended to the kitchen to take off the steaming kettle and make some tea for herself.

The two, discussing the enormities of Shelia's house-keeping, sauntered to the stables, and here Aunt Jane was so enraptured by the high-stepping grey that she finally made up her mind to have a horse of her own. Her niece would lend her saddle and old habit. If Mr. Rivers could purchase a horse to carry fourteen stone for one hundred and twenty, her eight and a little over ought to be compassed for fifty. She questioned Tom, the groom, who assured her that she was right. "A good cob'd take ye flyin'," he suggested, "bein' no heavier than a few dhry sthicks." In fact he knew of one—quiet, reliable, an' a fine steady fencer, belonging to a



cousin of his own—one Thomas Hartigan—then there was Mither Mac's chestnut, a treasure to a timorous lady.

Uncle James caught Aunt Jane's eye, and he whispered swiftly. "It was the usual thing—bare-faced endeavour to sell the horses of friends or relatives at probably double their value."

Miss Jane nodded intelligently.

"And quietness reminds me," added Tom; "this grey horse has a quare sort of a mouth, sir. I sent him out this morning, and when Con came beside him he just med off with the bye."

Mr. Rivers explained with some contempt that Greyboy was a lamb, with a mouth so tender one could not pull at it. He wished to rebuke the boy severely, and impress upon him that the horse must be ridden with loose reins.

Tom said that was all very well when you hadn't a boundary wall and a locked gate straight in front of you, but when you had it was customary to use a bridle as a means of pulling up. He produced Con, the boy, who smiled affably at his reprover, telling them "the pig-headed vilyin had a mouth like an injin"—which was his way of explaining it.

Uncle James, worsted in the encounter, thought it would be an excellent thing if he and Aunt Jane shared a groom, as Tom was evidently annoyed at their purchasing independently. He finally fired the elderly lady's fancy so much by his accounts of the simple Meleady that she allowed him to order the pony trap and drive her there immediately, lest some valueless animal should be thrust upon her by Shelia or Mac. Aunt Jane was fluttering as she turned to get ready and found her exit barred by the sour, wrinkled face of old Stephen, who had come to see the new horse.



It was clear, as he swept his dulled eyes from sulky head to docked tail, that Stephen knew something about it. He grunted as his orbs arrived at the weak hocks.

"An' a quare, three-cornered kind of a baste he is," said Stephen grimly. "More betoken he's the livin' image of the runaway colt that Thady Clancy sold to Pat Maguire outside. I was at a forge one huntin' day, an' they shoeing him, an' Pat sthandin' cursin' with a plaster of mud all over him."

Uncle James looked doubtful. This was the second person who had seen the likeness.

"He is a beautiful animal, Stephen," reproved Aunt Jane unwisely. "I only hope mine will be half as nice."

The criticizing glance which Stephen had cast upon the grey was blunt compared to that with which he honoured Miss Jane. He seemed to rend the tale of her years from a decent dimness and hold them naked into the glare of strong sunshine.

"Yerself," said Peter, "goin' to folly the hounds?"

"To go to meets," explained Aunt Jane hurriedly.

"An' good two-wheeled pony traps to carry ye there. I declare to God there's some that no age'd give sinse to," said Stephen, going stiffly away, leaving Miss Jane furious.

She was palpably put out as Uncle James drove the fat pony down the avenue and grazed a donkey cart upon the road outside. The temptations of hair dyes wrestled silently with her religious principles, and she feared, as she went on, that principle was distinctly getting the worst of it.

They drove by brown-pooled bogs, green fields, past the new hideous slated cottages which replaced the picturesque thatched cabins. Uncle James ever

expanding his world's wisdom and knowledge of horses and their ways until they reached Meleady's gate.

Their visit being unexpected, that worthy was endeavouring to cure a confirmed rearer, a lumpy swish-tailed bay, which was white with foam, and trembling from rough treatment, but was up again pawing the air just as they drove in. A pull at the cavesson ropes, the boy sprang clear, and the bay crashed back to the fall he had been threatening. With a plunge he was up again, thin streams of blood pouring from his nostrils, while they lashed him unmercifully.

"God save us," said Meleady, observing his visitors and flying for coat and hat and waistcoat. The lesson ended as if by magic. By the time a boy took the pony's head the little man was back, suitably clothed.

He listened to the duet of explanation, eyeing Aunt Jane curiously. Something very gentle and quiet . . . to carry her out to the meets . . . and jump, if necessary. Meleady chewed a straw and gazed pensively at his various stables; then a light dawned upon him. He went swiftly across the yard, opening a door isolated from the rest by a long open hay-shed at one side and a boiler house at the other.

"The very thing for ye," he said enthusiastically. "The sweetest mare ye ever clapped eyes on, and that gintle ye could take her into a dhrawin'-room." Here he swung the rugs, two of them, from a small liver chestnut with four white legs. She was a mean little thing, light-middled, round-shouldered, slack-loined, with a pretty narrow head set on a long mean neck, and a whip tail. Her eyes were sunken and unhealthy-looking, and there were very few things which she had not got wrong with her; but Meleady, the simple man, knew his market.

She had been lightly fired for curbs and spavin, a tendon was doubtful, and Meleady wove a tender film of fairy tale over the defects. The hocks were roughened going down the mountains in Kerry. Her fore leg got a knock that morning, but she was really sound and gentle, and a fencer—and a—grubber. A voice, unsuspecting strange visitors, suddenly rang from a boiler house beyond them.

“ I have the oats biled now, sir, an’ sugar on them, an’ flax seed ready, an’ she might pick a——”

The rest was cut short by Meleady loudly directing the unseen voice to go on and feed the cow without so much chat, and then plunging out of sight, apparently to deliver low-toned but heated remonstrance. He wiped his brow as he returned with a hand which appeared to have been dipped in wet bran.

He led out the little chestnut, walking and trotting her up and down. She went sadly close both in front and behind, but her springy action was undoubtedly taking, long weak pasterns giving her the elasticity of a thoroughbred. Miss Jane’s cold eyes took fire, an enthusiasm she hardly dreamt herself capable of warmed her heart to the mare. The pride of ownership, which dwarfs all others to the novice, thrilled her. Some better part seemed to wake as she stroked the velvety nostrils and looked into the gentle sunken eyes.

Uncle James, through it all, chorused palpably ignorant admiration, full of terms culled hastily from the sporting book.

“ Observe how she bends—her hips—er—hocks,” he said grandly, trusting he was right. “ See, Miss Jane, how excellently her shoulders lean, and how she uses them in front. Oh, a charming little animal ! ”

Meleady, listening gravely, said he had the great eye

for points. "And 'tis born, not made," he said cheerfully. The horse dealer possessed a vivid imagination, but no flight had ever carried him far enough to imagine two such simpletons being cast upon his well-netted shores. The magnitude of his chance made him generous, and he ended by only asking sixty pounds for the mare which he had been trying to get fit enough to sell for twenty.

She was one of Meleady's failures—bought very cheaply on account of her going so close, a fault he hoped to cure by careful shoeing; then found to be that most hopeless of things, a really bad feeder. Four days' coddling on flax-seed tea, bran mashies, and steamed oats would bring her out fairly well; two hours' exercise sent her back a sweating, dejected wreck, refusing all food. Every fence they lunged her over terrified her at first; she lay down on her banks in sheer terror, her heart beating in great raps, fell into her ditches and stayed there until they took her out with another horse, and then seeing what it meant, she grew braver and fenced cleverly and well. But one day's schooling meant four days' nursing; no shoeing saved her fetlock from constant raps, and Meleady had abandoned all hopes of passing her on when Aunt Jane appeared to him.

He cantered the mare round the paddock, put her across the easy fences, and came back grumbling to himself at the little animal's slack way of going, and weak loins and back, but smiling cherub-wise as he pulled up by Miss Jane—Uncle James going on with his flow of comment.

"Born and bred for a lady," Meleady said, slapping the chestnut's thin neck. "Sweetlass we calls her. Sweet be name an' be nater."

Sweetlass, late "that wasthral divil of a chestnut,"

sniffed at Aunt Jane's fingers, turning her weary, nervous eyes as she listened to the caressing voice. For three long months abuse had been her daily portion ; now, as she moved nearer, timidly friendly, Aunt Jane's heart was won.

But fifty pounds was her limit, and she said it with so much resolve that Meleady, making a virtuous concession of his great joy, closed quickly, and Sweetlass found a new owner. There was no pride in a good bargain or hope for profit about Aunt Jane as she gazed at the first horse she had ever called her own. Nothing but an affection she had not believed herself capable of, and dreams of what it would be like to ride day after day and see the sport which had thrilled her to such enthusiasm. Of course she quite believed that her money was locked up safely in an equine bank, to be received at any time.

She said this to Meleady as she went in to write her cheque, and was confirmed by his assurance that the same price 'd never buy the mare again, " God's thruth " for him. Which it was.

Early as it was, there chanced to be hot bread ready. Aunt Jane, refusing sherry, had to drink tea. It came flanked by boiled eggs and fiery whisky in a thick decanter.

" Soft-hearted I was, seein' ye had a wish for the little mare," said the horse dealer genially. " Sit down, ma'am, and take an egg. Ye could do with a bit of weight."

" I presume "—Uncle James sipped whisky and ate heavily buttered steaming soda loaf—" you make a great deal of money. The buying and selling of horses must be a most fascinating pursuit. Have you been at it for a very long time ? "



The unexpected sale and two glasses of his own whisky made Meleady discursive. He sat down and smiled at them. "'Twas the quare way I did take to it," he said thoughtfully. "I might be out in the bog now but for that bit of luck, for it med me see what was in it. Ye see—'twas tin year ago—I'll tell it to ye. I lived here and farmed a trifle, and rode anything that could jump with the hounds. Well, I had then a ould horse called Dundon, for I bought him from a man ov that name, and he was a fine slashing lump ov a horse, but lame in the hindmosht legs, and nothin' 'd make him right. Well, I rode in one day on a message to see Miss Magee, that always has a few hunters, an' she tuk me round, an' one she showed me was a black horse she called Quality Tells, that was as lame behind as me own. From the minnit she clapped eyes on Dundon she had a wish for him ; she was all for size, and he'd have carried fifteen stone. The heart was wore in her, she tould me, from Quality Tells, for she had him fired and blistered and bathed, and still he was lame. Lame an' all, I thought he might do me for the farmers' race that ould Dundon'd have no chance in—so swap them, says I, an' gave Dundon a belt of the sthick to make him move lightsome.

" 'I think I could cure that one,' said she, seein' I had but little done for him ; and, begob, to make a long story short, I found meself ridin' Quality Tells back here, and Dundon left behind me ; an' I wasn't half way home when I thought meself the biggest fool in Munsther. Bitter cowld it was, an' he cripplin' along as if the hindmost legs wasn't belongin' to him. But he was a fine quality horse for all, an' next day I whipped the coat from him and wint to the meet. Whin he warrumed up I knew he was a galloper, but begonnes



whin he come in he could only sthand upon his foremost feet and trail the hind ones, an' me patience left me. I threw an ould bag over him and put him out, not to be wastin' more food on his likes, an' God knows why he didn't die of the cowl'd. But faix he didn't, an' whether 'twas somethin' inside that was wrong, or whether the hunt did it or not, I can't say, but afther a week I noticed him throttin' and he usin' the legs well. The next thing was he lepped the gate to get into the hay haggart; and I declare to God in six weeks' time he was sound as a bell, so that I got him in, ran away with the farmers' race, pulled him out for a hunters' flat, and won that, and got a hundred and fifty for him from a Captain Stanley, that won a sight of races with him—that was my share.

“ But for hers—but Dundon within got no betther at all, though he had vits an' every other attention, till at lasht Miss Magee swopped with a man for two loads of fine straw—that was the last of him. But in the spring I was up at the Clonderley coursin' meetin', and however I managed it ”—Meleady looked discreetly at the whisky decanter—“ I missed them that drew me there, and found dark comin' on, and me twelve mile from home. I remembered thin there was a girl of the Hayes married a man up there, and she'd know me, so I med off and asked for a way to get home. ‘ We have no conveyance but a common cart,’ says she, ‘ but we have an ould horse within, and here's a saddle, an' ye can take him, an' welcome.’ Glad I was, too, so I saddled him up and rode off the horse. But afther a bit an' I clearer, I thought I knew the go of him behind, so I pulled up and got down and lit two matches, an' I saw 'twas Dundon.

“ An' that was the way, whin I saw the traffic a man could make in horses, an' the profit that was in it, that

I stharterd the bizness, an' I have twelve of them here now."

Meleady, still smiling, got up as they listened in amazement, and Uncle James said it was a wonderful country. "As ye asked me," he said, "for it is a long-winded sort of a story. Well, good mornin', ma'am, and good luck, and here's tin shillin's back for ye." And the horse dealer eyed Uncle James dubiously. "If ye've no great likin' for the grey I'll swop for another for ye any day."

Uncle James thanked him coldly. This, he thought, was a clear attempt in Pat's absence to get this valuable animal back again. Perhaps some one had explained its value to him.

"Well—keep a good bit on him," said Meleady. "He's a bit quare of his mouth, an' wants light handlin'."

"That," said Uncle James as they drove away, "is the right method of purchasing horses—independently—without fear of offence to your friends if you see any faults."

"How much you know about it!" said Aunt Jane in flattering tones.

"A man's experience," explained Uncle James, whose study of sporting books had supplied him with the doubtful jargon which so impressed his companion. Before leaving the yard he had looked into the chestnut mare's eyes, and then felt her legs with so knowing an air that Meleady would have felt anxious had he not seen the plump fingers press and pass over an undoubted curb without doubting for a second.

"You see"—Uncle James flourished his whip—"you see how, with some slight advice from Pat Maguire, I secured my own valuable grey horse for a mere nothing. The man actually wanting to get him back from me. I shall get a very large sum for him in the spring."

On Miss Jane's questioning him gently, he spoke of uncertain plans for travelling, buying a motor, perhaps a house, when his troublesome affairs were settled, and Miss Jane, curiously enough, seemed to have much the same ideas when mines resumed their normal value. And both sighed over futurity as if they feared the burden of riches would prove heavy.

As they hurried Shelia's pony along the narrow road, with stretch of coarse-grassed bogland merging to green field, and on past swelling slopes to a line of blue-hued, cloud-capped hills, Aunt Jane sat silent, gazing at it all. Here the hounds would run; pouring, silver-tongued, across those fields, or perhaps to those distant peaks where Shelia had told her foxes abounded. And she, Miss Brown, nervous and custom-hedged spinster, would see them go—perhaps even dare to take that tiny tempting gap, to feel the turf beneath her little mare's hoofs. Appealing wistful eyes and the touch of a soft black muzzle lay between her and all Uncle James' attempts at conversation. Newly wound up with knowledge, he was rapidly running down, and growing sadly mixed between shoulders, hocks, paces, and action.

Yet he was proud and full of gentle ill-natured joy as they met Mac and Shelia and Norman in the avenue and he told them of their morning's work. Shelia's fair face flushed hotly. She did not understand this strange haste to buy horses without consulting her. Aunt Jane's enthusiasm over the cubbing, and subsequent wild desire to come out to see it all, had amused her niece, but this flying away in secret to a horse dealer of somewhat doubtful repute seemed almost like a studied desire to affront.

"Mr. James took me." Aunt Jane's sour little face

was alight. "He knows so much, and described all the good points; and, Shelia, she's a darling."

Shelia looked at her curiously, listening while Uncle James, now horribly out of order in his equine works, endeavoured to give a thoroughly horsey description of the mare. "A dun mare—of unimpeachable—er—ancestry—I really advised the purchase, Norman—so exceedingly gentle, fenced most skilfully, with great hocks and straight shoulders—I mean fore legs—and—brown eyes—and——"

"Small feet," murmured Mac gently.

"Of course, very small—and——"

"A clear complexion and good hair," went on Mac drily. "Meleady has a lot of paragons lately. Of course, a poor thing like myself might have found a few faults in them, but I hope she'll carry you well, Miss Jane."

"As far and as well as my grey," said Uncle James playfully, edging away from his glass of port and piece of cake.

"That might be farther than you think," said Mac gravely. "And now feel that," as a cold splash of rain struck his cheek. "We may as well settle down to bridge, for the afternoon's going to be wet."

"For a fourth?" queried Shelia.

"Nancy might call," said Murrough Macnamara innocently, his eyes upon a pony trap which was coming up the avenue.

Mac's prophecy of a wet afternoon had proved too true; the grey clouds gathered and massed till, leaden-hued, they lashed the earth with cold, heavy rain. A north-west wind howled among the trees, beating the leaves down to make a thick, sodden carpet on the ground.

Chill winter seemed to leap into life. Shelia, being charitable, gave up bridge until after tea, sitting with Norman in the library, and leaving her own chintz-hung room to Mac and Nancy—Aunt Jane and Uncle James fortunately electing to play piquet in the drawing-room. Cheery fires blazed everywhere, and as they sat over tea talking and laughing, Shelia remarked that there was something soothing in really bad weather.

“It’s so inevitable,” she said, munching hot cakes hungrily. “No running to the window to see what it’s going to do, but a blissful certainty of abandoning oneself to an afternoon’s laziness, with a good book and a fire.”

Peter, laying down some fresh cakes, said Meleady’s man was over with the mare, “drowned to the skhin with the rain.”

“’Twas fine when he sthorted, he says,” observed Peter, “and indeed Tom says the little mare has a cold took already.”

“Then tell Tom to put her by herself,” said Shelia energetically.

“An’ the man’s waitin’ on ye, miss,” said Peter.

Miss Jane’s objections to tipping were strong, but she gave in to custom, and looked anxiously at the window, rain-blurred and dim.

“Meleady ought not to have sent the little animal to-night,” she said anxiously. “Should she take a chill, what can we do?”

Shelia said Tom had better make some tea, and gave Peter a message to that effect. The mare was then forgotten by everyone except Miss Jane, who went out.

As Peter took away, Shelia asked for her.

“She’s off to the sthables in the masther’s coat, an’ a cup of tay in her hand,” said Peter, grinning. “Ye can see, ma’am.”



A small, dark figure, carrying something, was scudding across the rain-swept grass towards the arch leading to the stables.

"A—cup of—tea," said Mac hysterically.

"Oh, poor Aunt Jane," said Shelia, running out into the night.

## CHAPTER VII

### BY WAY OF STOPPING A PULLER

"Oh the vigour with which the air is rife,  
The spirit of joyous motion."—*Gordon.*

A CHILL October day came weeping to birth, its arrival announced to Aunt Jane by the grate of the curtain rings on the brass poles, and the sleepy announcement of Maria that "here was tay." She laid the tray with its cup of tea and fringe of patent tabloids by Aunt Jane's side, and, having tweaked up a blind to let the cheerless morning beat itself in view against the glass, returned to Miss Jane's side to casually remark that Tom had been in and thought the chestnut mare was like to die, and was it the grey skirt or the black, miss, she'd lay out. The words spoilt the taste of Aunt Jane's tea; her toilet was a hurried one, and she sped to the stables hurriedly in the chill, drizzling morning.

Sweetlass cowered shivering in her big loose box, her coat staring, her eyes dull and sunken. A reek of porter and whisky and ginger filled the stable, for Tom, recognizing the necessity for strong measures, had just given her a drench.

In reply to Aunt Jane's anxious query as to what was the matter, Tom replied gloomily that what wasn't the matter would be easier to find out. Also, that he'd be



glad to know what she was fed on, for he himself had tried everything in life, and couldn't get her to look at it.

"Bran and oats and carrots an' steamed hay, an' she wets her lips and no more," he grumbled. "A nice kind of a thing for the winter that one'll be."

Sweetlass rubbed her head against Aunt Jane's thin shoulder, snuffing dejectedly against the caressing hands. She even licked a little wet bran up languidly when Aunt Jane offered it.

"If ever I saw one with a bad constitution it's the same brute," said Tom, his gloom deepening as he tenderly rubbed the mare's ears and sent for woollen bandages for her legs.

His tongue might run roughly, but any horse beneath his charge was his child. He heaved a sigh of relief as, warmed by her libation of spice and strong drink, Sweetlass ate a portion of her feed.

A very dejected little spinster returned to breakfast, forgetting in her abstraction to grumble at a single dish, and waiting almost wistfully for Shelia to come to the stables. It is written among Norman's good deeds that having looked at the little mare and looked at Aunt Jane's face he said nothing save "Poor devil!" But he rode round to Meleady next day and gave that simple gentleman a talking to which left him snorting with indignation.

Something in Aunt Jane's starved little heart had gone forth to her delicate mare. She herself was sneezing violently before luncheon as she ran backwards and forwards with apples and sugar and clover tips, and Sweetlass, touched by attention, ate them all.

The clouds still massed grey and chill, and fierce showers lashed the earth. It was a day to sit in warm rooms, and pity those who went abroad, yet Shelia,

towards one o'clock, as the motor, hooded carefully, panted round, gently reminded Uncle James that he must not forget his promise to Violet and Rosie Maguire.

"I have ordered the car at half-past three," said Shelia; "you are to call for them. I expect you'll get very wet, Uncle James—I am taking Aunt Jane."

All endeavours to flutter from the engagement were checked with firmness. The benevolence which had induced the little man to suggest going melted as he looked at the raw day. To be amiable at other people's expense is one thing, but to suffer for it oneself is quite another.

One would have thought as Shelia put on her fur coat that her great determination in life was not to disappoint her cousins. But the smile on her lips, as Norman drove her away, was not devoid of malice.

By half-past three the world was a sodden down-pour. There are possibilities of getting wet upon a car which no other vehicle enjoys, and Uncle James learnt them all.

Rosie and Violet, muffled in waterproofs, mounted dismally at one side. Uncle James sat alone at the other. Rain dripped from the coachman's coat, it came in torrents from the umbrellas and formed a pool upon the cushions. There were few more miserable men on earth when Uncle James descended in the raw, grey barrack square, and dripped dismally among the crowd which arrived.

Rosie and Violet, no doubt, enjoyed themselves greatly, but not from the novelty of sheltering under Shelia's wing, for Mrs. Rivers, dry and smiling, chose to arrive very late, to be exceedingly taken up by her humblest friends, and to leave very early. On meeting Norman's uncle, whose speech was lost in much sneezing

and his complexion fevered by many liquid precautions against chill, she relented, drily suggesting his return by train. "I'll send back the motor for you," said Shelia.

Train! As the thought dawned upon Uncle James that he could have come by train, driving in the old inside car to the station, the reproaches which he heaped upon his niece by marriage were heated enough to cure his cold.

Her thoughtful reply that she thought he was determined to drive the Miss Maguires made him glance at her quiet face, and mentally determine that Shelia was not a person to annoy lightly.

"You tormented them upon me, didn't you," said Shelia quietly, "and now I am going to take them home with me. I hope you will not have to wait long at the station."

Uncle James looked at Shelia, long and sourly, until he caught sight of Miss Slade and Mac vanishing from the dancing-room in search of some secluded corner. Then he sneezed irritably, murmured his approval of the plan with some bitterness, and went in search of Nancy's father. He found him alone, looking idly at the crowd of merry young people. Uncle James, his eloquence growing rapidly, stood by his side.

"Watching your daughter dance?" said Mr. Rivers nasally.

Mr. Slade looked about him and observed her absence.

"So charming! So pretty!" Uncle James wove webs with his small white hands. "We see so much of her—and of Mr. Macnamara——"

"At Dunmore?" Mr. Slade stiffened visibly.

"Constantly."

"They come together?"

"Oh no, they meet there." Uncle James spoke

carelessly, and admired a passing dress. "A worthy young man, Mr. Macnamara, but, unfortunately, so careless as to money."

Mr. Slade had been unsuspecting. His daughter's constant drives into the country had not troubled him. If he asked her—which was not often—she always told him of some place she had been to, to call. Also that she preferred her pony to the motor. A slim and pale young man, Gordon Grant, came looking through the room. Heir to a peerage, and fairly well off, he was the son-in-law the business man desired. Yet not too ardently to have interfered with Nancy, if Murrough Macnamara had been well off. But as it was, with his ruined house, desolate gardens, rotting out-houses, and string of useless horses! The old man's face darkened, and Uncle James smiled. He was paying Mac's careless jeers back with some interest.

Mr. Grant said irritably that it was his dance with Miss Slade that was just over, and turned to see Nancy flushed and bright-eyed coming through the door. Her contrition was not deeply marked. But she whirled away to the last few bars of the waltz, Mac watching her excitedly until he felt a touch on his arm.

The expression on Mr. Slade's face made him sigh. He looked up with the patience of a dog which expects a beating.

"Macnamara"—he followed Nance's father away from the crowd—"that girl of mine likes you, but I am a prudent man. You never leave her. What can you offer her?"

The newly cleared garden square, two scraped-up flower-beds, and half a dozen fresh slates, seemed terribly inadequate, but the glimpse of a horse's head outside brought back Mac's speech.

"Forefront," he said, and burst into voluble hope. Once given a chance—a start—he knew he could get on, earn money, do up the house, pay off the mortgages. "As it is, I've done something lately," he said. "There are a whole row of plum bushes, I gave a hundred on account to Carey, paid off two old bills, and there are three new doors in the yard. A man can't do more than try."

Something in the strange assortment of successes—or the look of Mac's eyes as they followed Nancy—made Mr. Slade thoughtful. "Look here," he said, "I disapprove of racing. I've never made a bet in my life and don't mean to, so those useless chasers of yours would alone put me off. But if in the next year you engage to get rid of those and show me two thousand pounds you've earned to start improvements with, I'll add the same to help it, and give you my girl. Until then, I'll do all in my power to keep you apart, for I hear you meet often——"

Mac looked across at Mr. James Rivers with a meaning, resentful eye. In twelve months, with the great striding colt there to earn it. Mac's blue eyes burnt with excitement. He was almost minded to rush down to Halsey's and order the wedding ring. One fortunate race would produce the sum. Then, if needs be, Forefront could be sold, racing abandoned, and he would live in his new-painted, rain-proof house with pretty Nancy with him. Much solitude had sharpened his imagination. The whirling, merry crowd vanished, the lilt of dreamy waltz-music grew inaudible, he saw the old home on a summer morning with Nancy out among the flowers. Nancy walking with him to a wide stable-yard, where nettles and thistles were not, and heads of bay and brown and grey peered from many open doors.



Nancy coming in to a bower of pink and cream to eat a breakfast where ambrosia and nectar were disguised under ordinary names.

And Mr. Slade, who had expected to see Mac's face set into sulky hopelessness, found himself set apart and unheeded as the young man dreamt. Was every one wrong? Had Mac saved money, and merely waited to astonish them?

"You—you—seem to be pleased," said Slade drily, after a prolonged silence.

Mac woke and looked upon him—with pity. For the old must ever dream of the past and not of the wonderful future. The lightness of an omelette; a chop's broiling; the swift rise of some stocks or shares; the looking at young people's joy, must make their happiness.

"You see—with Forefront it's so very easy," said Mac sweetly.

"Oh! . . . You mean you depend upon some wretched horse," and Mr. Slade wondered why he felt vaguely disappointed.

"Not upon a horse—a wonder. After that I'll give it all up. I'll tell you, too," Mac lowered his voice; "we'll keep it as dark as possible, but you shall have a bit on, and see him win."

"I never had a bet in my life," said Nancy's father indignantly.

"But you will then," said Mac serenely. "You will then. And as to keeping us apart, I'm afraid I'll do everything I can to see as much as I can of her."

"I rather like you for that," said Mr. Slade thoughtfully. "But—I'll only give you a year. After that I'll take my girl abroad. And you're not to say anything definite."

"Places they speak foreign languages in, why go



there ? " said Mac, who had no taste for travel ; then he sought Nancy to tell her some of his news. Guardedly, there was nothing actually settled between them. Mac would not speak until he saw definite hope. Yet as they sat chattering of Forefront and all he would do, they looked to the sunrise of a new life, and were nearly played away by the National Anthem.

Mr. Slade's tirade against the folly of horse-racing fell that evening upon deaf ears. Nancy was absorbed in considering the merits of various trousseau gowns, and how many new horses she could coax her father to give her, and what make of motor she would choose for her wedding present.

The bedizened and somewhat bedraggled Miss Cassidys were repaid for all their little sorrows by a glorious departure in Shelia's motor, their accents soaring to the level of the occasion until they were almost unintelligible in their fineness.

Uncle James, after a parting stirrup-cup, was bumped through the muddy streets to Cahervally Station, where he sneezed through an irritating delay. No motor awaited him at Johnstown, and the rain still fell in torrents. Uncle James had fixed upon pneumonia as the certain result, when the station-master suggested getting a lift from one Mr. Patrick Clancy, whose covered car waited outside.

Clancy was a dark-skinned, bearded giant, now pleasantly drunk. He said with all he had from town things 'd be a trifle skimpy, but the gentleman was more than welcome. So Uncle James, savagely ungrateful, was packed with the week's shopping, under the directions of the station-master to the porter.

" Put the flour above in the corner, 'twill make a cushion, an' the bag of male under his legs. Go aisy

with the paraffin-ile can, it might be drippin'. Now the baskit from Mulqueen's. Here's the case of porthor, an' if ye'd turrn yer legs, Misther Clancy, we'd shove in the few odd bits and the bag of manure."

Mr. Clancy dropped asleep in a moment, the old brown mare lumbered to her jolting jog, and Uncle James sat raving gently. The last bag thrust upon him was full of artificial manure, diffusing a variety of appalling odours; the reek of mineral oil told him that the can *was* leaking; a parcel of cotton-cake leapt from its place and smote him in the ribs; the basket rubbed his legs; the flour oozed white; the small parcels, such as nails, a new hammer, some tins of paint, and a new frying-pan, played a game of their own with his body as their goal. When Peter unpacked him, be-floured, rather oily, and much bruised, he omitted to thank the sleepy Clancy, and sulked openly all the evening.

Nancy, next morning, was somewhat astonished by the gift of a small motor, which her father said he wished her to use instead of the pony trap. It was also tempered by the arrangement that she was never to take it out without the new chauffeur engaged specially for her. Nancy, having thought a little, accepted with some reserve.

"That horrid, fat little Uncle James has made mischief," she wrote to Shelia. "Father was talking to him yesterday before he saw Mac. I am going down now to buy a new bicycle."

Uncle James needed sympathy that morning: he sneezed heavily, the smell of oil and chemical manure would not leave his room; he was sore in several places. He came down, sweetly resentful to Shelia, whom he blamed for his misfortunes.

Shelia regretted his cold, but she did not love her Uncle James. She remarked during luncheon that she expected Nancy to drive out that afternoon. "Those two children will sure to have settled a meeting yesterday," she said, smiling.

Uncle James smiled darkly. "I fancy not," he remarked in sweet tones. "I, in fact, hinted to Mr. Slade of the many meetings here. It was only fair, with a young man so absolutely ineligible."

"You . . . it was exceedingly uncalled-for on your part, Uncle James," said Shelia coldly.

Miss Jane was too uplifted by Sweetlass's recovery to attend to her friend's misfortunes. The little mare was now over her chill and eating delicately. She grew so much better in a few days that her new owner was able to ride her quietly about the fields, with an almost guilty sense of joy at the unexpected breaking forth. Uncle James, who was much interested in the fit of his new clothes, and received countless parcels daily from Norman's tradesmen, also rode—pacing Greyboy forth on to the roads, where the horse went quietly enough to calm all doubts as to his being a puller. Also, in secret, Uncle James essayed the jumping which he said he knew all about, swinging his fat little body in an agony of nervousness, and landing against the grey's back with proud surprise. After this he took several gaps, and having arranged a meeting with Pat, found a liliputian bank which was much easier to sit it over. As long as they were in the fields Pat walked, leading his horse, and smiling to himself; out on the roads he got up again, leading Uncle James to talk about Macnamara and his wonderful horse.

"I'm told he thinks he can't lose a race with him," said Pat bitterly. "An' he means makin' a fortune."

Pat's face was dark; he could not forgive the tale of the Hunt races. "He'll marry Miss Slade, and lord it there with her money."

Uncle James, looking meaningly at Pat's florid good looks and assortment of gaudy clothes, suggested that other people might, if they tried, prove as attractive as Mac. A long wait with no definite arrangement was always trying and doubtful.

Pat's fingering of his coarse moustache told that the idea was not new to him. He had for some time felt his heart beat faster when he saw Nancy's pretty face. A real lady as his wife could do much for him. The cunning in his brain set to work and saw light speedily. Pat knew several of Mac's creditors. It might be made necessary to sell the prodigy and not be able to buy him in.

They came to the outskirts of Dunmore, where, years before, Norman had been chased as a poacher, and Pat, looking over the wall, said they would find it hard to keep the place up when the suit was once over. "Of course the rabbits," he said, "always bring in a bit," and he suddenly checked his horse, then rode on again grinning—for he had thought of something.

"Just keep a loose rein on that fellow to-morrow," he said to Uncle James; "he might pull you a trifle—with the hounds."

Uncle James, wondering how a loose rein could prove efficacious to a puller, rode home thoughtfully.

For the morrow was the commencement of a winter's joy, the first meet. It was some distance from Dunmore, and Norman and Shelia abandoned all hope of help as they heard the constant shrieks for Peter and Maria. Uncle James got wedged half-way into a new

boot, and nearly hammered the toe off before they got it home, when he promptly developed the cramp. His pink coat was faintly tight, but the purity of his canary-coloured waistcoat, the whiteness of his stiff stock, and well-cut breeches, made Miss Jane speechless from admiration, as, feeling not a little ashamed of herself, she cowered inside Shelia's old habit, veiling herself thickly in the hopes of concealing her age.

They were late, scurrying through breakfast, driving off through a grey morning, with a west wind soft upon their faces, and the hill crests wrapped in dim, cold mists; through narrow roads, diving down hills and snorting up them, passing fresh, squealing horses with all caution, and pulling up well away from the crowd on the wide lawn at Rathduff.

A gleam of sun touched the scene to brightness—that hour when five months lie in front with all their hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. The waiting for that hunt of our lives, which comes, and we go on hoping for a better; the proving of the new horses, the fresh enjoyment in the perfection of the old, the glossing over of the faults of the one we would like to sell. He was going to be all right this year, and not rush his banks in that reckless fashion and tire visibly in heavy going. How glad we are to see every one, to hear the cheery man's rosy painting of flocks of foxes; a good entry, less wire, all prospects of good fortune, to listen leniently to the Hunt's Jonah as he contradicts every good report and lies softly, enjoying all presage of misfortune. He knows . . . for a fact . . . that there was no litter at Dirk—that the western side will hardly ever see a hunt—that all the best puppies died—that to-day—this is for our private ear—we'll be short of a draw, for Donovan O'Grady has wired all



his place, and won't speak to the master, on account of some quarrel—so they won't go there.

Then up comes O'Grady, lean and grey, sitting his chestnut thoroughbred as if he had grown to the saddle, and rides straight to the waiting hounds.

"Hallo, Ralph, old chap. Glad to see you. I've a brace for you all right to-day, and I got old Carty to take down his strand of wire, so there'll be no bother if you get away across his place."

The hunting Jonah melts away to invent some fresh tale. Dick Doyle's important little person swings itself upon his old brown horse, bandaged, stiff with age, yet able to warm up and go with the best of them still. Here is Kane Norton, exquisite as of yore, living here every winter, a pretty little wife riding with him. New habits are pulled into place by admiring and anxious grooms. The youngsters hump their strong backs and squeal from sheer excitement, the old hunters forget their years and compass more accomplished buck-jumps; the hounds move on, and there is a string, three and two deep, jogging along the narrow road leading up to Doleen. Pound of hoofs and jingle of bits and clatter of voices and unpleasant toot of motors in the background.

Through it all Miss Jane had withdrawn herself behind a friendly tree, ashamed of her own folly, yet watching with eager, dancing eyes as the little mare picked up mouthfuls of wet grass and chewed them languidly. Miss Jane could hardly realize the fact that she had dared to buy a horse, and was actually riding, and at a meet. She shuddered at the easy carelessness with which people treated their light-hearted horses, watching Shelia, neat and trim, sitting down to one of her big hunter's crooked bucks; Mac, somewhere



in the centre of a whirling thoroughbred which found earth too solid to rest upon ; Norman cantering his brown five-year-old round the lawn ; and Uncle James—Aunt Jane came out from the shade of her tree and looked—Uncle James was at the moment carried past her at a striding gallop, his hat taut upon its guard, his hand above his nose as he sawed at Greyboy's mouth—and Uncle James was not happy. Greyboy had not comported himself with dignity. If the curb was taken up he flung his head up into Uncle James' face ; if it was loosed he bored and raked until the reins ran red-hot through unhardened fingers. He sidled and snorted, backing against traps, plunging away from motors, until Mr. James Rivers was breathless and hot and very short of temper. When finally the grey compassed a buck, and the little man rocketed from the saddle on to the hogged mane, a friendly countryman advised him " to run a coorse around the field. Let him off, yer honour," he observed. " Civilize the schamer." So Uncle James started the course, to find himself suddenly whirling forward at a pace which brought the tears to his eyes. He pulled, he hauled, with the sensation of wasting strength against an iron bar ; and they thundered down the wide lawn in unchecked career. He was miserably weighing his chances of clearing the six-foot wall in front, or of hitting a motor, when Pat Maguire, seeing the flight, edged him off, caught the reins, and gradually brought the grey to a standstill.

" Dragging the mouth out of him," said Pat. " Didn't I often warn you to leave the reins loose ? "

Uncle James, short of breath and temper, wished to know how he was to stop the horse. " Was he," he inquired with heat, " to gallop on until he encountered boundary walls ? "

"There's but one way of stopping him," said Pat earnestly, "and that's to pretend you don't want to. Now I've told you that before, and I tell you again for your own safety, and you'll be sorry if you don't heed me. Leave the reins to him, and he'll pull up of himself."<sup>2</sup>

Pat, mounted on a raking, black weight-carrier, was gorgeous to behold. His swallow-tail pink coat was of ultra smartness as to design, though its carrying out unfortunately bore the impress of Mr. Timothy Doyle, the Cahervally tailor. Rosie had worked his sky-blue waistcoat, powdering it with an assortment of foxes' heads embroidered in vermilion and orange. His tie was a study in the havoc which clumsy fingers can work with white linen; his boots were too loose and his hat too small. A workmanlike-looking squireen in his worn tweeds, he looked like a badly painted advertisement in his new clothes. Violet and Rosie, sitting lumpily on two useful cobs, were also gaudy, their pretty faces framed in frizzed hair which straggled loosely—their crooked seats promised galled withers to their mounts.

"Let you be careful," said Pat, as he spied Miss Slade and decided to improve his acquaintance with her—"let you be careful, or the horse might really make a sort of a bolt with you."

Uncle James, wondering sourly what the last uncheckable flight had represented, joined the jogging throng and was at ease again by the time they reached the gorse covert on the hill. As they turned from the lane he saw Meleady, but that worthy appeared to melt into space before he could reach him.

"I saw the divil ov a grey pastin' round," he whispered to Pat, "an' the ould felly helpless as a dead

trout. Ye'll be overreachin' yourself if ye're not careful, and seein' thim cousins of yers rich as Creasas whin the grey has their uncle dead ; I wishes I let it alone. Besides, Mrs. Rivers'll be at me."

Pat's observation that if he wasn't ridden hard the grey would be all right was treated to a head-shake, and the remark that for his, Meleady's, part he'd never wished for it—and hounds opened in covert.

Whimper and deep note, another, and a chorus—there was scent in the gorse. A cub, astounded by the row, peered over the bank, saw the waiting field, and tumbled back again hurriedly, almost into the jaws of the hounds. A minute later an old fox, collected and wary, slipped past and on to a wood some two fields away. He got a slight start ; some of the pack were on the agitated cub, and scent, the mysterious, was poor and catchy outside. Now one had it, now another, they settled for half a field, hard-held horses were loosed as men stepped out for a start, then they were at fault again close to the wood.

"He's turned down." A yell rose from below ; two countrymen, hats off, lost in wild fervour as they saw the fox pass, danced upon the bank, waving their hats and shrieking frantically.

"Up he is—out pasht the ould berryin' ground—the biggest fox ye ever saw. Hurry on—let ye—with the dogs !"

The delay of hunting the line brought fresh yells, as with brazen lungs they judged the master for not coming on till he had the "vilyin cot."

"To be runnin' the ould bits of trail whin ye might have clapped the dogs near on to his back," said Patrick Maloney, in high dudgeon, to one of the whips. "An' they havin' in losht ag'in now."

The field, chafing, but in fairly good order, were held upon the brow of the hill while hounds scattered at fault in the hollow.

"Good—Lord!" said Norman suddenly. "Who's that idiot in a hurry?"

"Uncle James," said Shelia helplessly.

Now, Uncle James, by keeping the grey in the rear, right behind some other horses, and with the reins flapping, had got out of the field by the covert safely, and come across the two broken-down walls in the middle of a surging crowd, which gave Greyboy no room to pull. Here, upon the hillside, whips and master rode on alone, and the grey flung a jealous eye down the slope. He was weary of good conduct. Next minute he snatched at his bit, jolting anything he met out of his way, and galloped straight for the hounds—which were just hunting on slowly.

Gentle objurgation concerning fools who thirst for starts when hounds were not running, merging into hearty curses, came to Uncle James' ears. There was a cottage straight in front, a hedge and an iron gate to his left. The semblance of trying to stop his horse might have cleared him in hunting eyes, but the little man, remembering Pat's warning, let the reins flap obediently, though in active fear.

"Stop your horse, sir. Can't you see there's no hurry?"

Sir Ralph's eyes were greeted by the spectacle of a man who took no heed, but came on loose-reined—his unhappy eye upon the cottage in front—straight among the hounds—his spirits rising as he realized that the grey was steadying to a gentler pace and seemed about to stop. The pack scattered, yelping; a flow of magnificent language was lost for ever as the grey, swaying

uncertainly, struck the master's horse broadside on, and by the shock of the impact shot his unsteady rider against Sir Ralph, his arms clinging about the master's neck as he prayed that infuriated gentleman to stand still and push him back to safety.

Having done so with the rage of an outraged man, amid yells of laughter from above, the master found voice to thunder clear-toned fury at the offender. With a fund of biting sarcasm which he had scarcely believed himself capable of, he asked, why Uncle James had not even tried to pull up? where he thought he was going to? what in the name of the Deity were reins given to a man for?

"Not to pull at," interrupted Uncle James, with offended but firm decision.

"With the hounds under your feet. . . . Heavens! As you came on, didn't you see the hounds?" cried the master.

"I may have . . . incidentally. I also saw the cottage and the gate," said Uncle James stiffly, "and they looked much harder than the hounds, which I omitted to notice."

A chorus of hushed sniggers, bursting from those who had slipped up to listen, made Uncle James look hurt, and Sir Ralph, taking off his cap, rubbed his forehead with his whip handle.

"Personally," observed Norman's uncle, "I should prefer being able to stop an animal by pulling at it, but I have been warned to do it in the other way, and so complied."

The master hit his forehead hard and significantly and replaced his cap. "Get them across the road, Jack," he said briefly, as Uncle James melted into an amused but accusing crowd.



Shelia, riding up, reproved him sharply. Strangers, she hinted broadly, merely got themselves disliked when they endeavoured to pinch starts. Norman forgot the future cheque in his heated scolding, and Meleady, looking doleful, shook his head more sadly than before.

Uncle James, ruffled and sulky, very angry with his nephew, was pleased to find that Greyboy showed no disposition to join the throng jumping a bank off the road, so jogged round by a lane to meet hounds again as they hunted slowly to the right of a deserted churchyard and on to some marshy fields near a bog.

Here he sought the rainbow presence of Pat Maguire, to explain with considerable rancour that the grey had again gone on too fast, and this time got him into trouble.

Pat, who had seen nothing, was too pleased with himself to take much notice. He had, in fact, already whispered to two or three intimate cronies from the hills how he had altered and sold the pulling grey, and not a soul knew him, and how he was quiet enough with any one who did not excite him by pushing him to the front. The beauty of his swallow-tail and blue waistcoat made Pat's heart light as air. He had spent every available moment in haunting Miss Nancy Slade, taking her gentle civility for acute encouragement.

"You made a jab at his mouth, I'll be bound," said Pat. "Keep him a bit back and leave the reins loose to him, and he'll canter quiet as a lamb; but don't you haul at him. Take my word for it."

Pat passed airily on, sweeping aside a gloomy speech from Meleady, and hounds hunted slowly across the coarse-grassed boglands, with its network of deep brown-hued ditches.



Nancy and Mac found themselves together watching the puzzling of the line. Chances of a gallop seeming far away, they drew away from the others, standing by a straggling thorn hedge.

"How's Forefront?" Nancy asked.

Mac sighed. The usual stream of praise and confidence was missing; yet he answered that Forefront was well . . . never better . . . only . . . and then it came out. Some enemy was meddling in his affairs. Creditors whom he had had no fear of were pressing him, threatening him with the law. A mortgage—a teasing thing—had been suddenly called on. "There's some one at the bottom of it," said Mac gloomily, "and I'm not sure that Dan Cassidy, that rascally solicitor cousin of Pat's, isn't the one; he may have taken over the mortgage and urged Burke's people to press me. I fancy the colt must go to Norman for a time. But we must win that race"—here Mac's face cleared—"we must—the colt's a wonder."

Miss Slade first smiled, then sighed, and finally observed very demurely . . . that she had been urged by Pat Maguire to go to see his sisters on the following Thursday, and would turn in to Shelia's to tea. "The dreadful person has haunted me all the morning," she added, "prompted by the sisters, no doubt."

"I wonder?" said Mac heavily. "He . . . might imagine himself eligible as an admirer . . . now——"

Here Miss Slade snapped out sharp comment, just as distant yells told them their fox had turned and gone back to cover. Tired of dragging, Sir Ralph galloped to the shout, and the scurrying rush down the field proved too much for Greyboy. He bore himself meekly enough as long as he was wedged in the crowd, but when they turned off to gallop down the hill and

across the fields between them and the covert, he elected to go too, and by the shortest way. His pig-eye dwelt mutinously on the horses flying down the hill; a pull at his bridle was answered by a rear. Before his rider had time to speak, the grey had jumped the low wall, and was thundering hotly across the grass. Even an underbred horse can go fast with his hocks under him on a sound slope. The pace which Greyboy compassed was a surprise even to himself; he elected to look forward at the crowd upon the road, and not back where hounds, despite help, had checked again on the crest of the hill, and people turned to watch his flight.

Now the field they were in was fenced by a deep ditch, crossed by a muddy, deep track with a gate across it. Pat Maguire, keeping to the right, away from the crowd, slipped along to open this and avoid the jump. His whip was well involved in the stiff catch when he heard the thunder of hoofs, and, looking up, saw the grey swooping straight upon him.

Uncle James was sitting very still, gripping the saddle for support, crying out when the steep slope seemed to fall away beneath, and he found himself aslant above a coarse grey mane. The wind whistled past him, and the faint pulls he took with one hand were absolutely ignored.

As they thundered down upon the gate he saw Pat, heard unintelligible yells, and remembered the instructions. Had it been a stranger he might have gone on trying to pull up; as it was he loosed the reins completely, shouted feebly in response, and sat still.

"Turn him. Stop him. Damn you. Turren him," yelled Pat, turning his horse.

"I'm—not—touching him," piped Uncle James, not touching, sitting still and smiling faintly. Greyboy,

encouraged by the shouts, shot on faster, ears back, pig-eyes set. "Will he not——" cried Uncle James. The "stop" was lost in the crashing impact.

The gate, which was wooden, went down as a twig, as they tumbled over each other into a sea of liquid mud—covering men and horses. Pat's beast, maddened by terror, rolled frantically until he fell into the deep ditch; the grey, after a brief wallow, got up and ate grass.

The men, half stunned and winded, sat up and faced each other. Pink coats, canary and sky-blue waistcoats, and injured faces were of a nut-brown hue.

It was a dripping mud, slimy and insidious on the surface, clinging and stiff below. When Pat had cleared one eye and his mouth, and bellowed his opinion, Mr. James Rivers, busy with the back of his neck, received it with hurt surprise.

"In the name of God above us, why didn't you even try to turn him, seeing me there?" wailed Pat, clearing a second eye, and finding he was bleeding profusely.

"Heavens! Did I not leave the reins loose, exactly as you told me?" snapped Uncle James muddily. "I *was* trying to pull up, but seeing it was you made me remember. You assured me he would always stop if his head were left alone."

Pat Maguire said nothing. His feelings, as he struggled to his mud-coated feet and smote his half-drowned black sharply, were too deep for words. He gurgled inarticulately in his throat, and muttered of "witless idjits," and knew, though the day was young, that he must go home.

By this time a crowd of people had gathered about them. Uncle James was extracted as a tooth from his holding bed; Pat, savagely wiping his face into

streaks, had to ride past Miss Nancy Slade, who was laughing without restraint.

The accident had been breathlessly watched from the hill.

"The old man again. Lord, there's a smash," said Sir Ralph. "That grey is very like that brute of Maguire's that used to run away last year."

Meleady, standing by, drew a sharp breath. "An' Pat wrigglin' all morning' in that coat like a worrum on a pin," he muttered. "Begorra, I'm beginnin' to think," said Meleady mournfully, "that there's a God in heavin." And he cantered down to offer help.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE

"Then came a burst of thunderstorm ;  
The boy—oh, where was he ?"—*Hemans*.

A FIRST day's hunting, a wetting, a severe fall, and ten miles home upon a rough horse may induce pleasant weariness, or severe irritation and stiffness.

Uncle James Rivers awoke in a humour which Peter described as "being black as a hearse." He ached in every limb ; constant fits of sneezing reminded him of his stiffness. Moreover, expecting sympathy, he found Mac, Donovan O'Grady, and Kane Norton in the library when he got down, and found that his adventure had been woven and embroidered into a tale to delight the hunt during the winter.

"Pat, having sold him the runaway grey, told him to leave its head loose, and down the hill comes old Uncle James gripping the saddle and straight at Pat.

Mickey, of course, was there and heard it all. 'I'm *not* touching him,' he says," and here a roar of laughter drowned Mac's tale, and Uncle James, looking at him venomously, walked into the room. While Mac asked him politely if he had taken cold, and if he'd heard that Pat Maguire's nose was broken.

"Or a bit out of it, anyway," said Mac grinning. "I hear it took two hours to clean him, and the swallow tail will be purple for ever more."

Uncle James grunted sharply, the rancour in his mind against Mac growing deeper.

Miss Jane was out in the stables surveying the limp wreck of poor Sweetlass. Uncle James had returned early; Miss Jane had stayed until the end, revelling in it all. The chestnut was gentleness itself, easy to twist and turn, ready to gallop along roads or across fields, always eager to go or ready to stand. From various coigns of vantage, Aunt Jane watched hounds hunt, thrilled to it, longed to join the daring spirits who flashed across the grass and jumped the high banks. Even ventured herself to crawl through two broken-down gaps, holding the reins very tightly and trembling at her own great daring. When hounds opened, Aunt Jane wanted to scream from sheer excitement; she did not spare the mare in the evening, galloping fast by the road to watch a second slow hunt from Dirk; the consequences to Sweetlass being a night of utter exhaustion, following a long hack home. The pig-eyed grey was not visited by an aching master, but Miss Jane's stiff limbs dragged themselves backwards and forwards a dozen times in the morning to take sugar and apples and carrots to her little mare. She pulled at the cold, silky ears, rubbing them until her fingers ached. She patted and petted and fussed, until Tom,

arriving with a steaming bran drink, looked at her almost sorrowfully.

"The heart of her is in the little baste," he muttered, raising the bucket to the chestnut's unwilling lips. "An' God alone knows what hour the first chill or cold won't sweep the mare from us. She being as bad as an ould egg in her inside," confided Tom to his friend Mickey.

Uncle James piled up many cushions, ordered his morning glass of port, and felt he hated all fox-hunters. Norman, observing his uncle's thunderous aspect, kicked Mac, and proffered a patent bit for Greyboy, which would hold anything. "It doesn't look anything, but I've never known a horse it was not able to stop," said Norman. "You shall have it on next day, uncle, to try instead of Pat's patent methods."

"I hear Ralph's coming over about Sentinel's leg that you stamped on in the morning," O'Grady's snarling, melancholy voice broke in. "That dog is worth a lot of money."

Uncle James snorted. He said—his voice taking the crispness of burnt sugar—that it was no fault of his, and absurd nonsense. "If the man's dogs—hounds—had gone on properly, I should not have come among them," he snapped.

"That's a complaint we all suffer from at times when we're riding too anxiously, and find ourselves disliked," O'Grady laughed. "You'll remember your first day's hunting, Rivers. Then there's the broken gate, and Davy Walsh, the owner, is a cantankerous old chap."

"That's Maguire's business," said Uncle James.

Peter came in briskly.

"Davy Walsh from beyant is outside," he said.



"He wants tin shillin' for the gate the gintleman smashed to flitthers on him."

"Send him to Mr. Maguire," cried Uncle James furiously.

"He says he was above there, sir, an' Misther Maguire said 'twas none of his doin', an' so he tould Davy to go to the—to go to thim that did the mischief, sir. An' he's waitin' outside. He says the gate'd be akal to him, but his cows got out an' away up the road, an' he was a day gittin' thim, so he must have somethin'."

A purple hue suffused Uncle James' face. His blustering attempt at refusal being severely checked by O'Grady's snarl, he produced seven-and-eightpence, and borrowed the remainder to satisfy the owner of the broken gate. But it was clear, as Uncle James adjusted two cushions and drank his port, that his views upon the pleasures of hunting were changing rapidly.

The three, talking of their own affairs, forgot him; Uncle James strained his ears to catch the drift of their conversation. Mac's low voice was hard to hear, but Forefront's name was constantly mentioned, and as the young man told his tale of trouble, the old one, full of malice, gathered it vaguely. One thing was clear, the crack colt was to move his quarters, and come to occupy the best box at Dunmore. It did not suit Mac, at present, to be the ostensible owner of a valuable horse. Despite their muddled parting, Uncle James treasured all he could gather for his friend Pat Maguire.

When secrets were finished, the three men came to the fire, talking openly of Norman's six-year-old, the Collier, and his certainty of winning the Hunter's Flat at Rath in the spring.

"I'll lump every penny I can gather on him," said

Norman cheerily. "Retrieve our fallen fortunes for another winter's hunting."

He looked at Uncle James, then, being merely human, made a mental calculation as to how much that gentleman's cheque would add to it. The little man, observing the look, coaxed his round face back to its usual seraphic expression, smiling a smile which commenced well, and was twisted to a wry grimace by a twinge of pain.

"The old man will see to that," he said benevolently. "The spring will bring you a surprise, Norman, my boy."

It most certainly would; Uncle James could speak with certainty.

Donovan O'Grady, breaking into bitter moroseness, wished he would bring one to Mr. Pat Maguire. "Comes to the Hunt meetings, if you please," growled the lean old sportsman, "offers his advice, thinks he ought to be on the committee, and since we made him a member he has the buttons scattered over him thick as the weeds in Mac's garden. He was bad enough before this important affair, but now the man's unbearable. There's a crooked twist in him that one cannot get away from. Lord!" O'Grady looked round the comfortable room, with its huge book-cases and old furniture. "I wish the old fellow, Grandfather Maguire, would appear now to tell us what that—shake—of his meant."

"Possibly that the deed was in the waste-paper basket," said Norman. "Poor old man. It's no use meaning well when you jump your last fence and see the quarry outside. That piece of paper is pulp or ashes long ago, and though we go on searching in a kind of spurious hope, it's evident that as one can't find nothing, nothing can be found."

Mac proceeded to call him a Daniel come to judgment with cheery inaccuracy, while O'Grady weighed

the poker in his hand as if he wished Pat Maguire's head was near enough to settle it with that. "If your uncle, here, had only broken the fellow's neck yesterday," he said suddenly, "I declare—we'd have paid for the gate for him."

Uncle James, apparently thinking ten shillings a small recompense for murder, snorted contemptuously.

"And hanged the grey horse," said O'Grady. "Well, I must go home."

He slouched away, lean and old and weary, yet happy in his own morose way.

As the morning waned to afternoon, Miss Nancy Slade came by the afternoon train to Johnstown, intending to pay an early and formal call at Clonmony, and then go on to Dunmore for tea.

Pat Maguire, in the intervals of deep resentment, as he watched the excavation of his swallow-tail from its casing of mud, had spent the morning in preparing. He had despatched a messenger to Cahervally for iced cakes, and believing that a *tête-à-tête* would show him at his best, he despatched Rosie and Violet on a round of visits and shopping, with several commissions, which he knew would keep them late.

Unfortunately a friend from his native hills, one Timsy Hassett, a bibulous farmer's son, elected to come over for what he called a bit of dinner, and to sit on after it, indulging a thirst for whisky, first cold, and then in punch, which appeared unquenchable.

Timsy had reached the stage of fulsome compliment, and was passing to that of singing, when Nancy's ring came at the door, and the maid, glancing severely at Pat's visitor, announced coldly that Miss Slade had come to call. It was barely three o'clock; Pat had no idea of her arriving until after four. He started to his

feet, settled his tie and hair before the glass in the sideboard, bade Timsy, as he valued his friendship, not to stir from where he was, unless he slipped out home the back way, and flew to meet her.

As Timsy, singing that there was "nothin' half so sweet in life as lo-ove's young dream"—did not appear to pay the slightest attention, Pat took the precaution of locking the dining-room door and taking the key with him. His own manner was not quite composed.

Nancy, having taken in the composite nature of the furniture, was standing at the window with the remote air of a visitor who does not mean to settle down. She received Pat's emphatic greeting pleasantly, asking for his sisters, as she said she had not very much time.

The clipped haste of her speech swept the vision of a leisurely afternoon from before Pat's eyes—visits to his horses and a subsequent feasting upon the expensive cakes now arriving up the avenue in paper bags. Also, he remembered with pain that his new tie was in his room, and that his present one sulked beneath a blob of butter playfully cast at him by Timsy.

Mr. Pat Maguire, distinctly crushed, commenced to explain how he had not expected Miss Slade until much later, that his sisters were out and would not be back until—well, for a bit—and that in the meantime she must be content with him. His smile grew to a smirk—checked by a distant burst of song and a frantic rattling and pounding at the dining-room door.

Nancy looked round her nervously, and the row really perplexed her. A visit to Mr. Pat Maguire, alone, was quite beyond her thoughts. The affectionate gleam in his eye made escape imperative. Observing that he was disposed to sit down near her, she hastily

asked if she might see the horses, and also if they could do nothing for the person who was making so much noise, and who appeared to be suffering pain.

With a venomous glance in the direction of Mr. Timsy Hassett's cries, Pat took her out, showing her round the stables, where racers and hunters jostled each other in the untidy range of boxes.

Here Pat, followed by his worthy groom, allowed his fancy room. He talked grandly of his future career on the turf, of his hunting, of all he meant to do, and all the races he meant to win. The fresh air making him wish excitedly that he had never seen his friend Timsy, for he found his voice unsteady and the landscape blurred.

Now while Uncle James nursed himself, and Aunt Jane attended to her mare, the day slipped on, and Mac, about four o'clock, found himself hanging about the gate of Clonmony, wondering why Nancy did not come out. She had promised not to stay there for more than ten minutes. His impatience proving stronger than his prudence, he finally walked up the neglected avenue, and as he skirted the high, unkempt hedge of laurels, hiding the short gravel drive leading from the swing-gate to the house, he heard Nancy's voice excusing herself volubly, replies being delivered in rolling accents which suggested that Pat was not quite sober, together with a muffled din of cries and songs coming from the house.

Nancy had absolutely refused to return to the drawing-room. She was really frightened by the chorus which she could hear plainly as they came near the hall door; and as Pat could only silence his friend by strangling him, she was obdurate, and too polite to speak of the row again.



Some hurried entreaties breathed through the key-hole had only moved Timsy to fresh efforts as he indignantly demanded release.

As they went towards the gate Pat grew eloquent. "Two sugary cakes I sent for," he pleaded, "and the cook with hot bread in the oven."

Nancy replied hurriedly that she had intended to call on the Miss Cassidys, and regretted the misunderstanding. The hammering in the dining-room was now growing desperate.

"But ye must have tea with me." Pat grew flustered, as he entreated Nancy not to be disagreeable, to wait for his sisters, that the valve was off her bicycle, and then a sudden crash of glass was followed by the audible assurance that "Mary was me d-a-a-rlin'," and then, after a pause, "that there'd be murder done, if he didn't get out." At this point Pat grew playfully insistent, turning towards the house with the bicycle and driving Miss Slade before him, and Mac, very pale and stony as to expression, came quickly through the swing-gate.

"Shelia," he said, "is waiting for you, Miss Slade, so sent me across to ask you to hurry. Er—afternoon, Maguire."

"Good evening, Macnamara," said Pat, elaborately sober, and exceedingly sulky at the interruption.

"Unless you are remaining to tea with the Miss Cassidys," said Mac, looking round for them.

"That I'm expecting every minute," said Pat.

Now the veracity of this statement was checked by a sudden feminine shriek from the back "that 'twas no use botherin' her for flax seed for the horse, whin Miss Rosie wouldn't be back with it till the evenin' thrain"; and as Mac shrugged his shoulders and eyed Miss Slade



suspiciously, a window-sash was lifted, and Mr. Timsy Hassett, missing the sill, rolled on to the grass, where he trolled as he lay that he'd "have another glass afther his dhrive," and that "whiskee, whiskie was the only girrel for him." Then as he sat up and saw Pat, he called cheerfully that they wouldn't be forgetting him in a locked room again, and pointed spitefully to the broken window.

Icily suggesting that Miss Slade could certainly not stay for tea, and that Pat had better see to his friend, Mac held the swing-gate open for Nancy, and then as he took her bicycle he swung it so hurriedly that the step caught Mr. Maguire hard upon the shin, which, followed by the impact of the wheel, sent that gentleman staggering back into the hedge, where he struggled uncertainly just as Nancy turned to say good-bye. Then murmuring moodily that, anyhow, he'd kill Hassett, he gave one awful glance at Mac and returned to think of his spoilt afternoon.

Nancy, eyeing the thunderous profile of her companion, told the tale of her sorrows so elaborately that they were in sight of the wide gates of Dunmore before she had finished.

"To ask me there—like that," babbled Miss Slade, watching for a break in the cloud. "His sisters out, some awful madman locked up. I was never so much upset in my life. I call it—sheer——"

"Or I call it your own fault," said Mac, and strode away homewards without another word.

"Well—I——" Miss Slade put her head very high as she walked towards the house. But before she got there she seemed to develop a cold, for she sniffed and used her handkerchief, and when she was still out of sight of the windows she suddenly turned and rode

homewards—oblivious of the fact that her hind tyre was perfectly flat.

Two hundred yards down the road she overtook Mac walking slowly and moodily, and rode past him without a word. Until with a "Hi!" he stopped her, when she dismounted with great dignity, and Mr. Macnamara remarked gruffly that he had nothing to say to her, but did she generally ride upon the wheel-rims?

When Miss Slade explained frostily that she could ride upon her head if she chose and bade him good-bye and yet stood still, he took the bicycle by the handles, gloomily wheeling it round—as with his other hand he wheeled Nancy.

"It was those drunken wretches—near you," he burst out, "and—you were smiling. But you want your tea."

Nancy wheeled herself sharply.

"I am now going home," she said with dignity, and her lip trembled. "Anybody might know I smiled just because I—was so angry. Let me go."

"Shelia is waiting," said Mac, again taking her arm this time.

When Shelia, in amazement, asked them what on earth they had been doing, they had a great deal to tell about Pat Maguire, and very little of anything else.

It was during this week that Shelia was personally invited to accord her patronage to an instructive lecture at Rathduff, and consented to bring her guests and her son, being assured that the principal object of the lecture was the instruction of the young. She also invited Mac and Nancy to join them, and come to supper afterwards, the early hour quite forbidding dinner. At seven o'clock, on a misty evening, a somewhat dejected party bundled under the draughty

shelter of the motor's hood, and were swiftly conveyed to the portals of the Rathduff schoolhouse. A dreary, slated little building, long and narrow, divided by a low wall from the village graveyard, with its array of white and grey headstones and one stone vault.

Here a thin gathering of onlookers were gathered about the door, and a faint hum from within told that the lecture was in full swing. Both Uncle James and Aunt Jane felt the lack of dinner and were distinctly acid. Uncle James, in fact, said "My God!" as the heated atmosphere, with its reek of turfy clothes and tobacco, met them at the door ere they were ushered to their places. A mongrel mingling of strong hair-oil with other scents betrayed the presence, *en masse*, of the Rathduff national school, and a large sprinkling of girls from the convent at Grange.

The lecturer, a small, meek Englishman, with a bass voice and an assured manner, was rolling off rounded periods; endeavouring manfully to impart instruction. He was flanked by the solid presence of Fathers Magee and Doolan, sitting blackly in the shadows behind the paraffin lamp, both plainly bored to death, and further, by the Rathduff schoolmaster, who nodded and beckoned at his flock at each point, and showed such supreme intelligence and comprehension that he more than once compassed a delighted nod at them, muttering, "There now. Well! well!" at decent intervals, when the lecturer had said nothing of note, thereby earning more than one baleful glance from the injured orator.

Now, as being particularly suited to an Irish audience, he chose to enlarge upon the old poem of Casabianca, and the great lesson of childish obedience it contained, eagerly questioning the children to see if they had

gathered his drift—the lurid flames, the heat, the agony of facing death were painted, until Father Doolan squirmed visibly, and Uncle James' round face assumed an expression of boredom which was almost tragic.

Nail by nail the lesson of obedience was hammered into the small Irish heads, until they almost took their eyes off the schoolmaster and woke to a faint interest.

And the rest of the story is, perhaps, best told in Mickey's own language; he had, of course, bicycled over to hear what was going on.

“Gran' an' fine 'twas all goin' on,” said Mickey, “an' the little man had it all dhruv into us from the beginning, how Caseykanbey was so obaydiant, when Jerry Cassidy musht stroll in and sphoil it all. Jerry is a bit of a gossoon that's down about the new conthrac' for the cottages, and begonnes he was all the evenin' at Jane Dunne's public, whin havin' enough in, he'd thought he'd make off and hear the lecthör. An' just as he got inside, the little man above was all for makin' his p'int good to us, so to sphake, with the swatest grin on him iver you see. ‘The boy stud on the burnin' deck,’ says he. ‘Ye know that, stud on it, an' it flamin' red. Why, my fri'nds,’ says he, ‘did he sthand on it?’ An' ill luck got them that he shud fix Jerry with his eye.

“‘Why did he sthand upon this burnin' deck?’ he screeches, straight at Jerry, who looked puzzled like.

“‘Faix, maybe 'twas too hot for him to sit down,’ says Jerry, says he, pleasant and quiet. An' afther that there was no more lecthör, for the lecthörer had to sit down himself. With the gales of laffther about the place, and the two priests trying not to bust.

“An' signs by,” said Mickey. “He whipt up Father Doolan's tall hat, and med for Jerry to kill him.”

Shelia's endeavour to leave quickly was frustrated by Aunt Jane, who got lost in the delighted crowd, and all but flattened between two farmer lads, who finally, recognizing her distress, helped her out. Their last view was that of the infuriated lecturer brandishing the tall hat, in hot pursuit of Jerry Cassidy, who dodged him in the adjoining graveyard, while Father Doolan, bewailing his best head-piece, hunted both. The extinguishing of the lecturer, tall hat underneath, in a grave dug ready for the morrow, allowed the glib escape of Jerry; then Father Doolan, dancing with fury above the grave, read a burial service of horrible severity over man and crushed tall hat. They left him smoothing the remains of the latter, and endeavouring to assuage the wrath of the corpse's uncle, who declared there was no luck at all in a disturbed grave, and that if he was Jamesey, he'd not go into it at all, his suggestion being backed up by sundry relatives.

Norman, having gathered breath, had the car started. He said he was not at all sure that the next thing would not be the appearance of Jamesey, the corpse, to arbitrate, or the burial of Mr. Brown, the lecturer.

Desmond, who had proved thoughtfully attentive, remarked that it was really "gate fun." The direct outcome of the lesson being that he played "Cassabanca" for some days with Hannah Anne's children, until one was found smouldering and badly burnt.

Aunt Jane was hysterical, and Uncle James had to ask for champagne to soothe his nerves.

He would not, he thought, attend any more lectures at Rathduff.



## CHAPTER IX

## HOW THE CAHER TREATED SOME SPORTSMEN

“At fits the sudden gust rolled ominous,  
Anon with intermittent rage.”—*Southey*.

Now, Marcus Butler, Shelia's solicitor and devoted friend, had lately married an English wife, whose brother, a very eminent K.C., had, so far, never visited his sister. Butler, sorely troubled about Shelia's affairs, conceived the idea that his brother-in-law, Sir Sampson, might, if he interested himself, see a loophole of escape, or, as he was taking an enforced holiday from London work, be induced to help them personally with his bitter-tongued oratory. Having set his wits to work, Butler arrived one morning at Dunmore full of a complicated scheme. Sir Sampson Lowndes, it appeared, was devoted to punt shooting, and for years had wished to try his luck on the desolate shores of the Caher. So Butler had written, had seen Carty, the professional “fowler,” arranged to hire his punt, and was full of it all, as Sir Sampson had accepted. There were, of course, difficulties, for an expedition in open boats lacked comfort, and this was to be got over by sleeping at Greenagh and Athyne, lower down, both possessing little hotels which at least were habitable. This was Marcus Butler's scheme, but the kernel of it was that Norman, who often went himself, should take the great man upon the trip, win his heart, and, in glowing moments following some record shot, induce him to help them.

“Carty's sending the punt on to Kileneagh Island to wait,” said Butler eagerly, “with a man. While you



three can drop down on Thursday morning in the gandola, and Carty says you might get an odd shot at plover or snipe on the way. Oh, I tell you, Maud's brother is mad about it, and you know, he can turn black into white in a court."

Norman received the proposal with reserve, but Shelia, his wife, briefly remarked that he must go; and when she used a certain tone it was wiser not to argue. Little murmurs concerning hunting were ruthlessly put aside. So Norman accepted dolefully, for the prospect of five days upon the river had no charms for him.

Having packed up the very few things which bitter experience had taught him must be sufficient, he started for Cahervally on a dull evening with big clouds banking sullenly in the west, and streaking wisps of grey across the blue promising wild weather. Already the wind moaned, and cold rainstorms whipped the earth.

Weather to shut out with thick curtains after a day spent battling with it; but with the Caher's wide surface leaping muddily, mouthing with white stained jaws over the boat's side, with the wind unchecked across the stretch of leaden waters, and Carty baling with the kettle, as, chilled to the bone, one stole by a gleaming stretch of mud watching for a shot—Norman wondered how a luxurious Londoner, who had done his sport comfortably, would like it.

He found the barrister in high good humour. A pompous, clean-shaven man, with heavy, cold eyes and a shrewd mouth. Bitter-tongued bullying was his forte. Woe to the prevaricating, uncertain witness who had to face that steady glance, or writhe, if he slipped, under the merciless lash of Sir Sampson's tongue.

To-night he was genial and full of almost boyish

anticipation. Full also of pooh-poohing the ridiculous exaggerations in books concerning the discomforts and wildness of Ireland.

"I travelled in an excellent train, found porters civil and intelligent, all arrangements thoroughly in order," said Sir Sampson. "There was no crass stupidity, no hanging about at stations, none of the things which no doubt exist entirely in the Irish humorist's imagination."

"No—oo," said Norman doubtfully.

"It is no doubt entirely a matter of how you treat them," went on the barrister, as he drank some unimpeachable champagne. "Taken intelligently, they are intelligent; treated rationally, they are rational. Maud here," he smiled at his sister, who was many years his junior, "says she delights in them."

"They all do each other's work, and everything right at the wrong time," said Mrs. Butler cheerfully.

"Ye—es," said Norman, and as Butler broke in to say that Sampson ought really to wait and go to the court next day to see an Irish murder case, Mary, the maid, announced the presence of Mr. Carty to give a word about the punt.

Carty, a small bearded man, appeared smiling at the door to announce that the boat was "takin' in a tasthte too much water," and he thought it might be better to let himself and Mike at her "to-morry," and start early on Thursday. "There'll be enough wet overhead without sittin' in it," said Carty easily. "We'll drop with the tide to Nethaghe, and maybe his honour would like to walk a ma'sh or so on the way for shnipses."

Sir Sampson, receiving *sotto voce* explanation, grew more interested than before. Moreover, the delay would allow his attendance at court, which he was most anxious

for. He described his kit, his many contrivances for comfort, and fell into a warm discussion of birds, shots, and records, and the rival merits of the Broads and the Caher.

Norman, listening quietly, wondered whether the Englishman expected to go forth in a houseboat, but he said nothing.

His heavy things, Sir Sampson remarked, could go by rail, on to the inns where he supposed they would sleep.

Norman thought of the wide, muddy flats and the little villages about them. "If the wind holds for the west bank," he said; "if not, we may have to sleep in the boat." And then he went to bed.

The storm had not come with the morning. It was dark and lowering, with the brooding silence when Nature sulks before she rages, and as yet it was still.

They took a car to the court-house, pompous joy again overtaking Sir Sampson as he noted the rubber tyres and smart turn-out, and were accorded prominent seats to hear one Andrew Dunne tried for black murder. Sir Sampson knew the judge by name; he leant against the high wooden seat and thought how, when he returned, he would hold up to ridicule the slanderers of Ireland. True, the atmosphere was a little heavy and smoky, but otherwise he saw nothing strange, and the case commenced. There was no doubt of it, as the counsel for the Crown stated clearly how Dunne, having quarrelled with his neighbour, Thady Hannan, had, before witnesses, raised his stick, and, with a foul blow, struck the man dead. A young man swiftly murdered; it stood out black and forbidding, and the Englishman, leaning back, whispered that he would not care to wait for the sentence.

"He's not sentenced yet," said Norman drily.

Then Andrew Dunne, a fresh-faced, red-whiskered man, rose coolly and cheerfully to answer to the charge. His blue eyes were unabashed; he even nodded pleasantly to sundry relatives, and looked at Lee Gavin, a peppery, lean-faced little man, with open friendliness.

"Come now, Andrew Dunne—you deliberately——"

"Oh yes, faix," Dunne broke in. He had had a few words with Thady. He couldn't deny it. They got a bit hot over the little black calf that wint twice into Thady's cabbage garden. "Oh, we had words . . . surely——"

"You deliberately struck the man down—without warning," thundered the accuser.

"Yerra! Laws now . . . warnin' . . ." said Andrew contemptuously, "an' I maining to hit him."

"To hit him with a stick?"

"Well, maybe I had a bit of a kippin in me hand—maybe I had so—I'll tell ye." He leant confidentially towards the judge, who allowed him to go on. "Ye see, me lard, there was ill blood betune us, for he wanted Mary Brady, that's me wife, she havin' two cows and a pig . . . and whin I got him away berryin' his ould uncle, faix, I med me match. Ye see, thin he was always fit to ate me, and whin the black calf strayed for the second time, he blackguarded me to me face. 'Twas the day he died," added Andrew thoughtfully. "I wouldn't blacken me tongue to offind yer lardship with the names he laid on me, so I wouldn't. A fortin hunther—a dirty, lying thief—a——" here he checked himself. "Thim was white ones, thim was."

Lee Gavin, losing patience, broke in. "But you hit him—killed him without warning."

Dunne beamed upon him as on one of a lesser

intelligence. "Well, now, I can't say but I did sthrike him. No—hard, did ye say? Well, begonnes, I did sthrike him."

"Murderously. And he lay there." Counsel looked at the jury, but without the impatience which consumed Sir Sampson.

"Arrah, maybe he did so—sthunned like."

"Stunned! My God, his brains were out," said Gavin, exasperated. "You killed him, man—murdered him."

"Well, now, I did hear he died—after a bit." Dunne scratched his head. "He was hurt like with the tap I guv him."

"The tap which clove his head in," stormed counsel angrily.

"Would ye say so now." The kippin, a formidable blackthorn, was here produced, and Dunne, examined, said, "'Twas like his own, but slighter like. Well, I was a bit eggscited, and the bit of a kippin bein' in my hand, maybe I did give him a larrup. But sure . . . any of the neighbours will tell you how soft-headed thim Hannans is."

"When you murdered this unfortunate man"—the counsel had seen the judge cover his mouth, ere he sternly silenced the confirming chorus of the witnesses—"when you murdered him——"

"I did not," said Andrew, with some dignity. "I did not murdther him, yer honour. I sthruck him."

Sir Sampson, who had been fidgeting, gave such a snort that the court looked to see where it came from.

At this point several of the twelve good men and true were smiling pleasantly towards the accused—thrilling visibly to his refutation of the charge against him.

Hempen rope and black cap receded before Sir

Sampson's eyes. He looked at the beaming Andrew with stony horror, not unmixed with awe.

"But you cannot deny that you killed this poor man," Lee Gavin, a bloodhound in court, made another effort. "You brained him; he never stirred again."

"Well, he did lie quiet, surely," said Dunne. "Law, now . . . I remember he was paycable. But I shuk hands wid him," he added proudly. "'An' no ill will, Thady,' says I, bein' sorry he felt it a taste. 'No ill will betune us,' says I, me lard, an' I shuk his hand."

"Shook hands. And . . . the man was . . . dead . . . brained. I should like to go out," said Sir Sampson faintly as the first of the witnesses, fully prepared to affirm that Thady's death was the merest accident, went into the box.

"Do they think they have a right to kill?" he mouthed as they got into the fresh air outside.

"In mere hot temper it's nothing," said Norman equably.

Sir Sampson spent the rest of the day sight-seeing; but even as they flew homewards on a rubber-tyred car he was silent on the subject of the Irish.

"The . . . murderer?" he asked when his brother-in-law returned from court.

"Oh, manslaughter—duly provoked." Butler took some tea. "I saw him going off to take a drink with one of Thady's cousins. He said as he left that he was that put out by the way his stick fell he couldn't do too much for him."

"Dear heaven!" murmured Sir Sampson. "And it was the clearest case."

Butler, who had never been down the river, assured them they were going to have the time of their lives. And all Sir Sampson stipulated was that they should



be home by the following Wednesday to meet his friend, Lord Carton, who was going on to Killarney with him. "Interested in the Irish question—as you all know," he said. "A most influential statesman. He is now about to study it for himself."

"At Killarney . . . in the great Southern Hotel . . . in midwinter," said Norman, going to bed.

Next morning was a grey morning, the storm still holding off. Jagged cloud-whips laced across a dim sky, the sun had risen stormily. Norman left early to assist at packing into the gandola, and it was past the hour for starting when Sir Sampson drove up. Now Carty, when going fowling, had no idea of tact. He said simply that they'd no tug-boat with them, and he directed, personally, the ruthless unpacking and rejection of three-quarters of Sir Sampson's things. Why he included among his selection an air cushion and two white shirts, and left the great man's pyjamas, razors, and change of clothes, Sir Sampson never gathered, but it was so.

Then Carty pointed to a tiny sack. "There's me oileys an' me trousers, an' that's all a man shud require," he said.

They were all in thick clothes and long sea-boots, and carried cripple stoppers with them.

The tide was now ebbing fast. There were pearly shimmering reaches of mud on either side as they began to slip down. Uncut reeds still waved on the banks, the hush and mystery of a lonely river shadowed the world. As they left the town behind they could see tiny groups of birds upon the mud—hear their cries across the stillness. Faint weep of little plover, the shrill of redshanks, the hoarse laugh of the gulls—these and the rhythmical plash of the oars alone jarring

the silence. Sir Sampson felt it. He sat with his feet in a little lake of muddy water and spoke poetically of what this week would be: how, all day, they would glide over the great water's bosom, with those flat banks hiding the world; drop to the wide flats where it was almost sea; creep into the strange bird life and stalk and deal them death; eat and drink untrammelled by roof and conventionalities, in this sweet, still air with its sting of salt; sleep in quiet, lonely inns feasting on Irish fare—home-cured bacon, home-made bread, fresh eggs. All this to a man who had never known the wild side of life. And Norman nodded thoughtfully, for he knew the river-side inns of the Thames were those before Sir Sampson's thoughts.

Birds were more plentiful now upon the mud. The boat slipped on past opal-tinted flats on to widening waters. Here Sir Sampson remembered the snipe, and Carty turned half unwillingly to show him a "ma'sh."

They stole up a narrow creek where the silence was almost oppressive, broken only by the faint flop of the oars as Carty pulled softly, by the whimper and rustle in the towering reeds about them. They stopped where the banks rose steeply. Banks of shimmering, treacherous mud, as gun in hand, Sir Sampson, still poetical, stepped forth, light of heart, to plough to his knees and fall heavily, and rise, endeavouring to wipe a besmeared face upon his gun-stock as Carty sped to the rescue. Caher mud is hard to conquer.

"Let ye shim it an' not be treatin' it as if ye was tramin' the pavement," said Carty, severely. Norman, staying to mind the boat, studied the protracted passage of Sir Sampson until the reeds opened and swallowed him.

Then the tide turned. Swiftly it came pouring up

the narrow creek, filling the channels, coming so fast that in ten minutes the trickle in the mud was a flowing river, and the boat lifted nearer and nearer to the reeds. Shots rang out sharply, tiny birds winged swiftly over Norman's head, then a flow of bad language, delivered in crisp Saxon, came muffled from the heart of the reeds, and was followed by the radiant dishevelled presence of Sir Sampson Lowndes, his tie whisking awry, his grey suit coated with mud, his cap gone, and two snipe in his hand.

"I got a most difficult shot, my one chance," he cried, as he ploughed with exceeding caution towards the boat; but his statement of his shooting did not quite coincide with Carty's, who appeared with three little birds.

"Not bein' quick enough, he missed two," observed Carty, with calm candour, "and rose more with the dint of swhearin'. Here, we're two hours late, an' the tide ag'in us—and God save us! here's the wind."

It came with a sudden rush—a roaring of bending reeds and whisper of startled waters—came suddenly and died, and again there was stillness.

"Over," said Sir Sampson, feeling his bare head sadly.

Carty, diving into his sack, produced a cotton bandana of startling hues, which he offered modestly, observing that, "as it had never been med use of, 'twould kape out the chill."

The morning's pearly tints had darkened and died. A dirty sky sailed fast—dull brown and grey, with low wisps of dense vapour scurrying nearer earth. The silence was broken by a new rasp of wind and whip of cold, spattering rain.

The river is readily troubled. Muddy waves splashed

them as they slipped out. Norman, taking an oar, bent his back to it against wind and tide, talking already of shelter.

They reached Kileneagh Island, a mud-fringed patch of grass, rising bleakly useless in the river. Here the punt, rocking in a calmer sea, awaited them, and the men who had brought her scudded away with the tide. Then, in a mist of driving rain, with the wind snarling over their shelter, they chose the least exposed spot and sat down to eat their luncheon.

"Untrammelled," said Norman softly, as he bit at a sandwich, leaden as only damp meat and bread can be, "by roof or conventionality," and he thought of the certain morning's find at Killowen, and the run he must have missed. Sir Sampson's glance at the weather did not promise help in the case.

Fingers had to be sat upon to grow warm enough to hold tumblers, but comfort came in steaming coffee from a heaven-sent Thermos flask; and as chilled blood glowed a little, and Carty finished his second bottle of porter, sucked simply from the bottle, they looked at the heaving waste of water, at the rain hiding the Cahervally shore, and wondered what they should do. The short November day was already closing in.

Sir Sampson's kit had been despatched to Greenagh, and as hopes of a shot that day were out of the question, his thoughts were biased by hopes of dry clothes and warmth. Setting the waves aside as naught, he suggested their starting to pull or sail across.

Carty, glistening in his oileys, with the precious trousers husbanded beneath a seat, smiled. The island was not far from the Dullen shore.

"Yerrah! Greenagh, is it," he said. "We'll be lucky if we can slip down to Roynish and lie up there.

It's our corpses they'd lay out at Greenagh, afther we crossin'."

Norman's memory of Roynish was a few poor cabins crouching on a barren shore ; he glanced at Sir Sampson and wondered nervously where they could sleep.

Carty thought hopefully there might be a bed at Creehan's. "Times whin the da'ther's in service they do have a lodgin'. A poor place it is at the besht."

Sir Sampson, chilled and wretched, clamoured against this decision, and of getting at all costs, to Greenagh. Carty looked at him cheerfully, and told him he might try. "But don't be afther askin' me questions at the inkwidge," he added, "for I can only say I gave ye warnin'."

So thoughts of dry clothes, of cigars, of papers read by a blazing fire, died as they pulled out and met the swoop of the wind. Sir Sampson was surreptitiously writing last wishes in his pocket-book, when they began to feel the shelter of the Dullen shore and its thick belt of woods. Roynish Bay is a wide arc of sand-fringed mud, with here and there big stones tumbled blackly near high-water mark, and a few poor houses crouching about it. Invisible now, for the November dusk had shut them blackly in, and there was nothing to see save the gleam of each white-crested wave as it mouthed at them and sank beneath the boat.

Pulling cautiously in gloom, they grated against a few stones, tumbled together for a landing-place, and clambered ashore, the men making fast the punt as Sir Sampson waited desolate upon a desolate shore. Everywhere, through the blackness the whimper and hiss of stormy waters, the moan and roar of the wind, the whip of the driving rain. Pin-points of blurred light showed the existence of human life ; they stumbled towards

them along the rough causeway, and over the boulder-strewn shore. Youth and luck sped Norman from rock to rock ; but if there was a sharp edge Sir Sampson struck it twice. He slipped from slimy seaweed, he plashed into unseen pools, until sheer wretchedness overpowered his language, so that, ceasing to treat each accident as an offending witness, he came in stony silence until they tumbled over a loose stone wall on to the firmness of macadam, and the shelter of the overhanging woods allowed them to speak in peace.

"The landlord, I trust, will be able to lend me a hat." Sir Sampson touched the sopping bandana. "Do you think, Rivers, he'll have a spare suit of clothes?"

Norman observed that he being a she, he was afraid it wouldn't do ; then, seeing a window where two jars of sweets, a packet of Sunlight soap, and some bottles of porter jostled each other, he pushed open a door and asked if Creehan could give them a lodging.

Three or four men were drinking at a dirty bar, the reek of warm porter, paraffin, and turf-laden air backing ashamed as it encountered the fresh blast of the night, and they walked in blinking. Beyond the little bar was a fire-lit room, where Mrs. Creehan hushed her latest offspring to sleep. Having dumped him down to wail bitterly she hastened to meet them, full of astonishment.

"An' ye drownded wet—out fowlin'," cried Mrs. Creehan hospitably. "Ye craythurs. Hould yer whisth, lovey, hould yer whisht," this to the squalling baby. "Give over bawlin', and I'll bring ye a sweetie. Here, Mary Kate"—she seized a shock-headed girl of thirteen by the arm—"hurry out yer grandma from the room within and put her along with us, and do up the bed, astore, for the two gentlemen. And Mary, call ye da' till he whips the head off a chicken here."



Her glance at a row of unsuspecting roosters killed appetite for chickens. Norman said so firmly, producing the plover, and Sir Sampson shuddered. He looked at the small room, he sniffed the odours from the bar and the pig, which nestled in the corner, and he muttered that he could not stay.

"The boat, then," said Norman, as a gust of wind rocked the house. The Englishman sat down, unwound his bandana headgear, looking about him helplessly. The scurrying crossing of a protesting grandma, buttressed up behind by the pushing arms of Mary Kate, made them realize that they were usurping a needed bed. Every window was firm, and the heat was almost unbearable.

But Mrs. Creehan was hospitable. Green feathers hailed fiercely from her dirty fingers, until, in a few minutes' space, four fat plover hissed in a frying-pan, and there was hot tea and eggs and sodden shop bread and good butter awaiting them on a clean, coarse cloth. Carty, whose manners were in some ways princely, ate in the bar.

Norman ate and drank philosophically, eyeing Sir Sampson. He knew what their bedroom would be like. They dried out over the fire until sleep overpowered them, and they were ushered by "da'," a bashful giant, into an earthen-floored cupboard, filled by a wooden bed, chill with a cave's dankness, and reeking of musty feathers.

It was at this point that Sir Sampson found the white shirts and nothing else, but to do him justice he merely said "dear God," very drearily, and sank sniffing, wearied out, into the pile of feathers to snore, until in the morning a piteous qua-a-king, as it seemed beneath him, made him dream he was shooting duck,

and they were all coming at him, grunting strangely. He woke to horrified half-intelligence ; in the dim light he looked into the eyes of what appeared to be a wild animal . . . grunting hideously.

It was too much for early morning nerves. His hurried exit across Norman found the tenderest place on that young man's body ; as he sprang for his gun he fell upon the wild beast, which fled with the high-pitched agonized squeals which only a startled pig can give.

Norman, declaring himself to be bruised to death, awoke hurriedly, just as Sir Sampson, gun in hand, unearthed a bright-eyed duck safe in a basket, from under the bed, while, from the squeals and noise outside, the pig appeared to be still alarmed.

Mrs. Creehan, clothed in several petticoats and a shawl, thrust her head in to apologize. "The craythur had been sickly, and brought in for the warmth, and was used to the old woman feedin' it. As for the duck, she bate the face off Mary Kate, who had been told to remove it—that was Mamma's little duck."

"I thought—I was half asleep—I thought it was a wild animal," explained Sir Sampson lamely. "I—oh, dear God . . . I'm eaten alive. . . ." Here he examined a large collection of small red marks, and swore not over-softly.

"They found you softest, thank goodness," observed Norman heartlessly, tumbling his bruised self out of bed.

Unwashed and unshaven they ate breakfast among the ruins of last night's supper, and went forth into a wild November morning. The wind had lulled a little ; the ebbing tide was baring the dreary bay. Outside the Caher heaved leadenly below a leaden sky.

Carty, ever cheerful, put up a rag of sail, so that they scudded out with a lap of water against the bow. Down, tacking cunningly, until they could see small bundles of teal and a few heavy duck, and then Carty, raising the glasses, saw the big pack out on the mud.

"Yerra, the wather's all duck," he said excitedly.

Sir Sampson sat up and breathed hard. The duck were following their favourite *Yarosta marina* as the tide fell, edging the mud in a black cloud as they fed greedily. The big cartridge was home in the punt gun, with its muzzle cocked up.

Norman and Sir Sampson crawled into the punt, and they slipped nearer and nearer. Then, with thunderous roar of wings the widgeon rose, curled round, and alighted on the water nearer the edge of the mud. Carty gave the shot to Sir Sampson, lying himself on his back, his head an inch above the combing, his left arm in its waterproof glove, paddling softly as they crept along nearer and ever nearer, while hearts beat to the glamour of the stalk.

Sir Sampson watched intently. A glint of sun slipped from the wrack of cloud, a wary curlew scenting mischief in this weird craft crossed them screaming. A laden gun drove at the pack to put them up, the wounded were its share. On past the shimmering shore, almost close enough now to the widgeon, who were swimming slowly back to their food; no sound save soft whee-oo-whee, the grating quack of the heavy duck, the lap of the waves against the side. Carty, peering, saw it was time; he touched Sir Sampson's ribs with his foot, holding the punt still, the wee-en-oo of the birds almost round them.

The bandana-covered head rose warily, taking sight at the blackest part of the pack. Sir Sampson pulled.

Boom went the gun, the recoil driving them twelve feet back, and pandemonium seemed let loose. The sky was darkened above them, as with roar of wings the pack rose, a roar mingled with shrill screams of curlew and redshanks. Sir Sampson, with his nose cut and bleeding badly, yet raised a happy red-stained face, and Carty, springing deep in the muddy water, wrested cripples from the waiting gulls. The small guns, Norman's and Sir Sampson's, coughed sharply, stopping the maimed things, following those who had escaped, while Norman ploughed and wallowed thigh-deep in the heavy mud.

Then in half an hour they met again, having gathered forty widgeons and some heavy duck—three contented men.

"Beded, I got ye the fair rake of thim, yer honour, and ye made the great shot entirely. I tell ye, ould Magee beyond'll be atin' his own face, for he's waitin' on this pack for a fortnight. But God sin 'twas too rough for him to cross. But we missed a few in the rough wather. I waited till I saw the eyes of thim, and onst they lifted their heads I guv the sign. An' the nose swhep' off ye, yer honour, with the crack the gun guv yer, but what matther, an' ye gettin' the fine shot. Yerra—yes—we have Magee bate out."

But fate, for the rest of the time, was against them; the morning lull was a mere taking breath on the part of the storm. It swooped again wild and persistent, until they could only hug the Dullen shore, and it grew too wild to think of sport. All hopes of getting across had to be abandoned. A miniature sea snapped and mouthed, threatening to swamp them, and they ran to Killraghan, lying there in the shelter to eat a chilling lunch of sardines and boiled eggs, which, Mrs. Creehan

having economized time, had only reached the glutinous stage.

Here, as they crouched behind a point and tried to imagine they were keeping warm, Carty pointed to a thatched cabin standing low down on the shore, and asked Norman if he ever heard how ould Danny Hanrahan there married a mermaid.

"He was out one morning trying for a duck or a plover," said Carty, lighting his pipe, "and, begonnes, what shud he see but, winther as it was, a fine young woman duckin' an' divin' in the say, an' her cloak, that was a soort of a shiny green, lyin' up above on the pint. Well, Danny was a wild character, and he thought 'twas his own cousin, Mary Hanrahan, that was mad for the wather. An' of coorse, bein' a dacent bye, he thought the other clothes shud be somewhere. But the cloak was that tasty that he was all for a joke to hear her screechin', and so he clipped up near and whipped up the cloak; and begonnes, as the gerril turned, he saw the fish's tail on her. Oh, cripes, says he, and says a prayer and laid to his oars and med off, but he fergot, faix, to lay back the cloak, an' he drhew the boat home, comin' in thrimblin' an' shakin' with the dинth of fright. His ould a'nt kep' house for him, but she was away to market, so bein' now afeared of the cloak, he drew it up into a hole in the thatch, an' wint to hang the kettle up, and indade, befour 'twas on, 'I'll do that same for ye,' says a voice swate as honey, and he saw the young woman that was swhimmin', walkin' in, but with legs on like any Christian.

" 'I come for me cloak,' says she.

" 'What cloak?' says he.

" 'Me cloak,' says she, 'or I can niver go back to say,' and she beganned to bawl, gentle like.

“ But bawlin’ or smilin’, she was as purty as a May day, with a sight of yally hair an’ blue eyes, an’ a white shkin, only the two feet on her were splay and flat. ‘ An’,’ says Dan to himself, says he, ‘ a Christian I’ve med of her by takin’ the cloak, and divil such a fine gerril ever I saw, an’ I needin’ a wife.

“ ‘ So take a cup of tay, me darlin’,’ says he, ‘ and don’t be talkin’ nonsense about cloaks an’ the say,’ says he, ‘ unless, maybe, the sun got at ye.’

“ An’, it bein’ December, that was only somethin’ to say.

“ ‘ Ochone,’ says she, ‘ why did I come prospecting up the dirty Caher ? For they all tould me not to,’ says she. An’ she prayed for her cloak.

“ But faix, Dan couldn’t whip his eyes from her, and whin his a’nt came he said he found the gerril shipwrecked out on the river, a bit silly like. Well, to make a long story short (he tould it all himself later). The gerril remained, always axin’ for her cloak, and Danny married her, she goin’ to chapel like a lamb and doin’ everything abaydiant. The good wife she was, too, for five long year. Ye could see yerself in the chaney an’ brass there, and she was niver done workin’. But all the time lookin’—iver lookin’—under beds an’ in mattresses, out in the pyaty garden, until at lasht she seemed to forgit. And then one mornin’—there was a sthorm in the night, an’ it whipped off a taste of the roof, an’ in with one of the chidther—‘ Mammy,’ says he, ‘ there’s something green in the roof.’

“ With that she let a bawl out of her. ‘ Me cloak,’ says she, an’ she cot a howld of it and away with her to the wather’s edge. She guv one look back, she kissed the child, and they niver saw her again. But, begorra, God’s truth is in it, for he has three fine sons, and every one of them with splay feet on them.”



Sir Sampson coughed heavily—his only comment, but Norman, as he looked across the lonely waters, smiled quietly at the tale.

They had come in this open boat, hoping to sleep comfortably at Greenagh, on the Cahervally side, and making it their head-quarters, and if not, at Clonahilty, which also was civilized. Grievous folly as it turned out, for if tempted by a lull they tried to steal across, the threatening stretch of white crests, the leaden jumble of waves, drove them back to shelter. So for three days Sir Sampson, with bandana wound about his head, Carty patient and cheerful, save when anything threatened the sack holding his trousers, they were battered by wind and rain, waiting for a shot which never came to them ; seeing the cold, wind-swept mud alive with birds, and something ever preventing their getting near ; twice sleeping out in the boats rather than again face the horrors of a grandma's bed, her attendant court of fleas, and the morning visit of the pig.

Unshaven, unwashed, red-faced, and weary-eyed, three more disreputable ruffians had seldom been seen, as they buffeted past Clonahan Bay in the yellow light of a storm-torn evening. Norman's hands were blistered and torn, the skin was rough on his face, yet he was as nothing to Sir Sampson with the iron-grey stubble fringed by the damp bandana, a crimson, scarred nose, and gloomy, red-rimmed eyes. A great wrack of clouds drove up from the west, the birds called shrill prophecy of fresh rain. Everything in the boat was wet, their feet plashed in water, the rugs were sodden. The barrister talked no more of the joys of this wild life, but he asked feebly if there was nowhere they could shelter, even with fleas and pigs and hens, as long as a roof covered them.

Norman turned to Carty, and Carty looked at the night. He too had had enough. "We could," he said uncertainly, "make Moye. There's a decent sort of a hotel there, an' the wind's droppin'. We might cross to Greenagh in the morning."

"Pull then," said Norman, and they bent to it steadily. But as the flat shore stole past them, Norman found Carty failing to put his heart into it, and shifting continuously behind him.

In language suited to the evening he inquired the reason several times.

"I'm destroyed in me sate, yer honour," said Carty at length, and with some peevishness as he shifted again, "destroyed entirely."

Sir Sampson beamed bravely from the bandana and took an oar, relieving the chafed Carty, who sat upon his precious trousers; so they toiled on until they pulled into a shallow bay, with the lights of a fair-sized village twinkling on the shore.

"Even with fleas and pigs it will be something to get an Irish welcome," said Sir Sampson, walking stiffly, "and to get warm. I am sick of discomfort."

Leaving Carty behind, they went into the village to find a somewhat pretentious two-storied slate house, where Mrs. Annie Rourke was licensed to sell beer and spirits.

"Now, if we'd been able to sleep comfortably, one would not have minded the days," went on Sir Sampson as they strode in. "Of course, it's all been most unfortunate." A shrill "God save us" from a fat woman, sitting by the fire, welcomed them.

The kitchen was clean, and a kettle hissed upon a little range.

Mrs. Rourke fixed her eyes upon the dripping, muddied

clothes and stubbly, crimson faces, Sir Sampson's being particularly adorned by his fiery, injured nose.

"You can give us some bacon and eggs and a room," commanded Norman with the curtness of the over-weary.

"Not to the likes of ye," observed Mrs. Rourke, without moving. "I know ye—Throt."

Sir Sampson, growling fiercely, asked if she meant she had no room, to which Mrs. Rourke, still sitting with uncompromising sternness, replied that she might or she might not; but if 'twas she had a barrack idle, 'twasn't to house thrampin' wastrels. Further, she informed them that her house an' family had always been dacent, and suggested their seeking Dullen gaol-house, to live with fellow robbers.

Norman's response was merely that, anyhow, he meant to stay, and he sat down, an action followed by his now raging companion, who, as he unwound the bandana, rolled out portions of the Hotel-keepers Act, intermixed with certain words not to be found in parliamentary documents. But Mrs. Anne Rourke was obdurate.

"Dacent she was, and kep' a house for dacent people, not for robbyers." In the intervals of abuse she shrilled calls for an unseen Andy, and despatched a small girl upon an errand. As the barrister touched his head Norman sat silent looking at the singing kettle. "Let me talk to the good woman," said the older man. Norman allowed him to. To Sir Sampson's assurance of his social status her reply was brief.

"Sir in me hat," she snorted. "An' ye none but travellin' tinkers. An' where"—she shot suddenly to her feet, thrusting a red face close to Sir Sampson's—"An' where are me cousin Mary Cassidy's orpintons, will ye tell me?" she shrieked. "An' Timsey Dunne's fashionable gandther that he hatched from a show-yard

egg. Ye'll tell that to the polis, maybe. Off me chairs . . . ye vilyins. . . . Oh, ye may shake and thrimble."

Sir Sampson Lowndes, K.C., groaned in pure agony of spirit, finding faint voice to ask if Mrs. Rourke was acquainted with the law.

Replying darkly that if she wasn't he soon would be, she glanced at the door. Sir Sampson, driven to desperation, gathered fresh courage. He foamed, appealing to Norman for God's sake to say something, he knew the people; but Norman said nothing, and drew the red fire nearer the singing kettle.

"Dear God . . . they won't believe us," foamed the elder man. "They think we are . . . chicken stealers." He absently made the bandana into a slip-knot, blustering fury; and here Andy, a ponderous, loose-mouthed youth, shambled in, accompanied by an ill-looking terrier.

"This boy must possess common intelligence. He will hear reason." Andy listened to the Englishman's impassioned explanation and his mother's comments, and he looked them up and down.

"Outside wid ye," he remarked shortly. "If so be ye can show yer money, I'll not deny ye a glass, but aftherwards the polis is handy, an' the lock-up convanient."

"They'll put us there, too," observed Norman placidly, breaking the silence, "if Carty doesn't come."

"So foot the road, ye fowl robbers," said Mr. Andy Rourke.

The K.C. sank back silently. The most stern of deities would not have scorned the broken and contrite spirit which for the moment he offered up.

"Off me mother's chairs," said Andy. "Ye won't

—will ye—thin . . . here, Beauty, girl. Here, at thim.”

The timely arrival of Carty, who knew every one, saved the situation from becoming one of active encounter, for Beauty was growling savagely. Norman thoughtfully fingered the poker, and the barrister was ready for war.

“An’ why in the name ov God didn’t ye mention *me*? ” said Carty, reproving Sir Sampson, who said meekly he might have thought of it. When Carty had finished with mother and son, and had scathingly explained that the ould one was the Lord Chancellor of London, with the King behind his back, and Norman husband to Miss Maguire of Dunmore, and therefore a greater personage, and that Mrs. Rourke would be lucky if she got off with six months, the fat old woman wept contrition, while Andy said, “Bedam, an’ they like nothing but tinkers.”

“Intelligent people, if you take them intelligently,” observed Norman to the kettle, as he listened to Sir Sampson recovering his dignity by the use of much bitter speech. And then two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary blocked up the doorway, the elder of the two requesting Sir Sampson to have done.

“So ye have thim cot, Mrs. Rourke,” he said cheerily, “an’ we travellin’ Dullen searchin’. An’ cruel queer vilyins they are, them same—— What’s that, to hould me tongue? What’s that, Carty?”

Had Carty not arrived before, there is little doubt that an eminent Englishman would have been haled to the lock-up instead of the police retiring discomfited.

As it was, with “Vo vos” and “Yerra yerras” and “who’d think thim born dacent to look at them,” Mrs. Rourke could not do enough to atone. Nothing in her

house was good enough. Eggs frizzled in a pan with thick, white slabs of bacon; she pounded together a cake; she routed for her one pot of jam, with a crust of sugar above on it. She despatched her girl to redden a fire above, and "if the daas' neshts sthopped the chimbley, to schrape it with the handle of the hay-rake." And every other word was an apology, chiefly directed to Sir Sampson, whom she sometimes called "yer lardship," and sometimes "yer holiness"; these being the highest things she had heard of. She proffered him a taste of lard to rub upon the "poor batthered nose of him, his holiness pardoning the liberty," and Sir Sampson, applying it, shone as a greasy sun.

Worse still, in her anxiety to be forgiven, she whispered to Andy, and just as they ceased revelling in hot tea, strong bacon, and half-baked bread, and storm-battered and weary were thinking of bed, that youth returned, followed by a round-shouldered young man, with distrustful eyes and an uneasy manner, while Mrs. Rourke explained proudly that "there bein' no company for his lardship an' his frind, she'd made bould to fetch Doctor Clanchy, from the dispensey, to play a hand of cards."

A more aggressive type of Jackeen than the dispensary doctor would have been difficult to find. Sir Sampson shook hands with forced politeness, murmuring "Dear God" aloud, and Norman yawned openly. Doctor Clanchy, on the other hand, welcomed company. He was all for a hand of nap, and produced a filthy, stained pack, as he requested Andy to get him two bobs' worth of coppers from the till. They came greasy, reeking of porter, and the doctor piled them beside him.

"And aren't ye mad idyits, now," he said politely. "Out in an open boat this day of the year. Stormbound



this side. Why didn't ye car it away? Isn't it most dangerous for a man of yer age?"

He dealt, as Mrs. Rourke, horrified, plucked his sleeve, and Sir Sampson, a little woodenly, proceeded to explain his enjoyment in the outing.

Remarking that he had a fine healthy colour on him afther it, the dispensary doctor went nap, puffed out vile tobacco, and won the game.

Norman's attempt to write down the score was swiftly checked. "No, no. I wouldn't understand that at all. Pay after every game. No cypherin'. Pay now."

"Dear God!" said Sir Sampson.

So as each game was lost and won, the greasy coppers changed hands, and with the hot room blurred by sleep, Norman and his friend suffered a martyrdom of disgusted weariness.

They were nodding openly when Clanchy, a winner throughout, rose to go. "Busy times," he said, "with the dipthiery here. Ye were lucky to get me, for I just ran home from Casey's child, an' I must be off back now to sign the certificate, for the breath was just out of her. Wasn't it well I didn't stay to see her go?"

Sir Sampson, who feared infection, woke suddenly and edged round the table, afterwards smearing himself in paraffin oil, the only thing he could think of.

Bed at Mrs. Rourke's proved not uncomfortable, and in the morning the wind was dropping enough to give them hopes of crossing. If not, Sir Sampson said he must drive back to the Dullen line, as his return on Wednesday morning was imperative. Lord Carton must not be kept waiting.

Mrs. Rourke, hoping that some day his holiness, the chanceylord, might return to Clonakilty, despatched a

messenger with a telegram for Norman's car, and they dodged about the shore, luck sending them another good shot, until the calming water gave hope of crossing, Norman, wearied with pulling, putting up the sail. As they slipped from the shore, a spanking breeze caught them, and they heeled to it merrily, slashing with plop and swish through the waves, sprayed from head to foot and clinging to the side, as Norman, sheet in hand, sailed her. It was grey dusk when the wooded heights of Greenagh, with its pretty sheltered harbour, came nearer and nearer, and they shot in.

Sir Sampson looked at the small hotel, memories of the other side making him groan aloud. When Miss Hannan, the proprietress, had got over the shock of their muddled beauty, she informed them pleasantly that only that same day she had given them up, and, indeed, was very regretful, but all their bags were gone back on the midday. "An', indeed, I have two tally-grams since to know where ye are," she added.

There was a train just starting, the last that night, but they were hungry; also, Sir Sampson firmly declined to travel in the bandana. Nor would he borrow a hat. They waited for the motor, the Englishman comforting himself with the reflection that merciful darkness would veil him when he arrived.

The motor came hooting in, as they sat down to roast ducks and chops; and later they said good-bye to Carty, on a clear, soft night, crisp of frost in the air, a white moon sailing softly in a star-sprinkled sky. Nature, having toyed with them for a week, now lay back and smiled.

"Well"—Norman turned to Sir Sampson, as, fed and washed, and still unshaven, they throbbed out of Greenagh for a thirty-mile run—"well, Lowndes, what of it all?"

Sir Sampson looked back, peered under the bandana at the wide, lonely river, silver in the moonshine; at the reaches of mud flats where the birds whispered melancholy notes, and then he sighed.

"It was the maddest piece of folly," he remarked tartly. "But though I probably never shall, I should like to come again. But . . . not in an open boat. And the people are . . . incomprehensible."

And Norman smote him suddenly hard upon the back.

"But the discomfort, the people are preposterous," said Sir Sampson peevishly.

This, if he had been a wise man instead of Norman Rivers, was the undoubted opportunity to speak of his legal trouble, but as they flew through the still evening, past the craggy, stone-fenced country, Norman remembered swift gallops over the light land, and talking of them forgot everything else. There was the house where so long ago they had come to ask for tea and found a dead man to receive them. There the bog they had crossed in the waning light. Here Kilcooln gorse, black against the flickering moonshine, which no man had seen blank. And he talked until Sir Sampson wished he hunted, and the car began to slow down. It was only a puncture, but as they went in sharp jerks and with strange wheezings, until the chauffeur announced sadly that "he feared the coil was run down on him, and God knew if she'd drag him home."

They had left at ten, it was now nearly twelve, and they were many miles from home.

Always hopeful, they tinkered and tapped, so that each time they crawled on for half a mile, and Sir Sampson fell into uneasy slumber. He slept while Norman worked, and woke in the chill of the small hours to hear

they were eight miles from Cahervally with absolutely no hope of moving. The fine night was changing to clouded darkness. There was nothing to do but wait, or, as Sir Sampson said insistently, procure a vehicle. So they sat soberly, but no rattle of hoofs or rumble of wheels came to cheer them, and the night had passed, when in the darkness they could hear a cart coming.

Sir Sampson was past being particular; he swore a great deal, but his spirit was broken; he scorned the idea of walking, which Norman said he preferred, so climbed eagerly into the ponderous wooden vehicle, to be jolted and bumped forward at a foot-pace. Moreover, a hideously unpleasant smell drove to his nostrils, half stifling him, for the cart was one used to fetch manure from the town. Yet he endured, and, ere he slept again, saw in the dimness the hollow which held the town. In the blackness of a wild morning, he reached it, having intended to walk in, but absolutely tired out, sleep held him, and he was jolted slumbering through the waking streets.

"I have ye got there—sthir up, your honour," observed the carter, cheerily pulling up at the Butlers' house.

Sir Sampson rubbed his eyes with hands which smeared him greenly, then bandana-swathed, a two-inch stubble on his chin, scraps of old manure clinging to him, a scar upon his fiery nose, he climbed over the tail-board to face a humming, widely awake house.

A prim, well-dressed little gentleman was at the moment coming out with Marcus Butler. He stopped—and stared—and stared again.

"Got home—out all night." If Sir Sampson's colour could have deepened, he would have blushed as he looked into Lord Carton's eyes. He staggered with

sleep and stiffness, reeling against his friend ; and the odour upon him was a potent one, while a smudge, long and green, adorned the statesman's grey coat.

As Butler, completely overcome, leant against the railings and gave his merriment vent, Sir Sampson sped full-scented to his room.

"You—you could run a drag after him," gasped Butler to his new guest, who had arrived an evening too soon, and being alarmed for his learned friend's safety was just going to the telegraph office to wire fresh inquiries.

"'Twas no conveyance, as I thried to tell him," remarked James Flyme, the carter. "But begonnes, in he got in despite me, and slep' it out within. Here's Misther Rivers, walkin'."

Lord Carton placed a delicately white pocket-handkerchief to his thin nostrils, and went in—very slowly.

When he met his friend, now bathed and shaven, at breakfast he listened to the tale of misfortunes with a remote air.

"So far as taking you for tinkers," said the statesman dryly, "it—er—seemed a mild deduction. And this morning . . . on your arrival—I am told potheen is fiery—were you not—er—slightly intoxicated?"

"Carton!" thundered the barrister hotly. "I——" He gulped—it seemed a last straw.

Lord Carton, confused by the fiery glance, drank some tea, remarking then that he was so glad to come over to personally study the Irish question and people.

"Which you'd much better not make an idiot of yourself by trying to meddle with the one or understand the other," snapped Sir Sampson, flouncing out of the room.

The visit to Killarney and Cork proved a curtailed one.

## CHAPTER X

## A GOOD HUNT

"You must have it at speed or not at all—  
'Twere better to halt than to ponder."—*Gordon.*

It was over a month before Sweetlass plucked up courage to face the world once more. For three weeks she languished sadly in her stable, and Aunt Jane sat with her. Her physical exhaustion was helped by a rubbed back caused by a bad saddle. Shelia wanted both hers, and Miss Jane almost wept when her pet winced and shivered. Tom declared the ould saddle was two mile too wide for a small bit of a mare, and Uncle James stepped to the rescue. Miss Jane must accept a little Christmas offering—in advance. He wired to Champion and Wilton, with the result that the trusting firm despatched a saddle guaranteed to save Sweetlass from all other hurt, and merely enclosing a bill, which Uncle James tore up, but that he kept to himself.

Greyboy, the pig-eyed, had been tried in the new bit, and though he evinced a disposition to rear and sulk, it stopped him. The long, thin bar brought him to a standstill without the "Alice through the looking-glass" method of leaving the reins flapping. Having tried it, when his stiffness wore off, in the fields, Uncle James decided to hunt the horse again at Cahircon on the following Friday, and in the meantime he wrote a letter, which was a model of delicate abuse, to Meleady, requesting ten shillings for the broken gate as some slight return for the selling to him of a runaway horse.

Mac, who now spent half his time at Dunmore, never



passed the grey without muttering Pat Maguire's name thoughtfully. "I could take my oath it's the same brute," he said to Tom, "and Meleady's a ruffian."

Forefront, his delight and hope, now lived in the best loose box, with his own equine valet always in attendance, and it really looked as if, for once, Mac had made no mistake.

The colt improved daily. His silky coat threw off a bloom of health, muscles rippled under his supple skin. He fought for his head at the end of a long spin, and came in to polish his manger, snuffing for the last grain of crushed oats. High-spirited, yet generous and gentle, he looked the stamp of chaser who might one day come home first at Liverpool and hear the thunder of acclaim from the big stands.

Norman wanted Mac to send the horse away, and do him fuller justice in a good training-stable. But Mac would have none of it. Expose his darling, have him hot favourite instead of a dark horse, starting at tens? No, he could train him himself as well as they could.

Shelia was not without her own crack, a long, low black almost clear-bred, which was to run away with the Tally Ho Plate at Cahervally. Jumps would have suited him better, for he was a clever hunter, but Captain Harman, who was staying with Sir Ralph, had already bid for the Collier, and would give four hundred pounds for him if he won this race; so Shelia, thinking of her ebbing fortunes, was only too glad to try. So far as they knew, they were almost sure to win.

Pat, coming on unwelcome visits, looked darkly at the two horses and laughed to himself. His cousin's cold treatment made him very sore, and the malevolence of his expression when Shelia talked confidently of her win might have warned her. His bluffing boasts

of what he meant to do were not calculated to inspire affection, but he did not think of that.

"I'll take over the ten acres from you in the spring, Shelia. You won't want so much land then." The ten acres were outside his boundary gate. "I tell you, I'll win the Cup with my bay mare," and so forth, until his cousin's grey eyes grew murderous, and she looked round for Mickey, whose ready tongue often helped her. Mickey shrewdly suspected who poached his woods in the night, who slipped in and snared in the rabbit woods, fenced high with wire netting lest the foxes should get hint there. Mickey suspected, but for once had met foemen worthy of his steel.

"Himself and his comerade Andy. The soort of man that'd pick the money out of God's pockets," stormed Mickey, missing his game. "The devil himself couldn't match thim two. May he have the chance before long."

Cahircon is a woodland meet, where three demesnes adjoin, and those who mustered there on Friday morning had little expectation of how their day would end.

Miss Jane slid uneasily upon her new saddle and twittered to the chestnut; Shelia was on her black, with the fired grey meeting her at Tulloun; and Uncle James used his reins with a tyrant's joy, unmercifully stopping the grey every minute, just to let them see he could do it, until that sour-tempered animal fell to open sulkiness, and rearing high, slipped his master off on to a heap of stones and then kicked him . . . gently . . . with no intent to hurt.

The direct consequence of this was the seeking out of Meleady by Uncle James, on foot—what that worthy called the "blackgyarding of him" before the assembled hunt. Now it was hard luck to receive a dog's abuse

for a deal which, to do him justice, the horse dealer had always objected to and frankly told Pat was not fair. But he got it, delivered in Uncle James' sugary accents, in Norman's crisp tones, and Mac's gentle drawl.

To have captured this unsuspecting Englishman, sold him a bolting brute.

"Which begs when it can't go on," foamed Mr. James Rivers, rubbing his bruised shoulders.

"And strikes at you with his feet," shuddered Miss Jane.

"And, anyhow, you know, Meleady, it was a hang shame of you, and a dirty, low trick to play," said Norman.

"And I"—Meleady spied Pat Maguire; whispering to him swiftly that he required help, that he must say it was a horse of his which he believed safe; he did this under cover of the accusing chorus—"didn't I offer to change it an' face the loss? Didn't Mr. Maguire here buy it for him? Doin' the deal . . . not me," stormed the irate dealer, turning to Pat. "Now, isn't it true?"

Pat hesitated. "I—of course, I believed in what you told me, Meleady," he said, with careless, haughty sweetness.

"And oh, really, *I* would never have believed it of you," said Shelia reproachfully, for the horse dealer was a friend of hers. "The mare is gentle, and Miss Brown loves her, but this——"

It was the last straw. A chameleon might have prided himself on the variety of hues which flitted over the unfortunate man's face. He cast one look at Pat Maguire ere they turned and left him. It was an eloquent one. His code of honour forbade the telling of the truth.

"Blackgyarded—miscalled—names thrun on me." . . . His infuriated eye followed a swallow-tail pink coat. "Wait, Misther Patrick Maguire."

Uncle James, meantime, had been hoisted back into his saddle, and, divided betwixt fears of bolting and begging, perched there in uneasy wariness, touching the bits with cautiousness until he found the medium, Greyboy, a self-satisfied look in his eyes, comporting himself with gravity.

As they galloped round the fields about the house and avoided the sunk fences, Meleady found time to speak to Pat Maguire. He did so very directly, with no searching for gentle words.

Pat smiled loftily. "I owed you a hundred for the brown mare, and you took my horse for it," he remarked shortly, which had not been at all the arrangement. "If you told me the horse was cured and gentle, fit for an old man—why, I believed your word."

"An' he walkin' down out of yer own sthable the day before," foamed Meleady.

Pat listened to the hounds intently, and grinned. No eloquence of threats or supplication could move him to own to any part in the transaction. He galloped away, and Meleady, watching him, took a deep-breathed oath that one day he would be even with Pat Maguire. And he kept it.

They rattled a fox about for half an hour, pushed him out and across to Linockslaney, a craggy, jutting hill, with dark patches of gorse upon its side—a miniature mountain, springing from a sea of boglands. Good horses flagged and panted as they struggled up the steep sides. Close to the woods of both Kilgraney and Ballinakill, foxes almost invariably made their way to one or the other, but to-day, as the field gathered waiting for

hounds to come back, he elected to slip down the far side, and point his mask for the Muldu River and the boggy lands about it.

Those who got a start had to slide down the almost perpendicular sides, jumping walls upon the way, and then to gallop hard to catch hounds across the holding green fields, fenced by formidable drains. Aunt Jane never attempted to climb the hill, and to Uncle James' joy the grey elected to sulk and stand stock-still, so both were safely upon the road. Shelia, with a fair start, stretched her good black across the bottoms, until hounds checked on the edge of a green-hued treacherous bog, and no one knew if they could cross it. They must try or stay behind. Hounds settled down, running fast over the marsh, struggling with splash of silver spray in and out of a wide drain. Sensible people went round, but the foolish, who are always happier, felt their way on a crumbling track: reeds hiding brown-hued pools, stragglers to either side vanishing into appalling quagmires, until they slipped over a mighty bog-drain in one possible and easy spot, galloped with brown splutter of mud at another, and tumbled off a high bank over a bottomless abyss of harmless-looking green mud, which claimed six victims before a crossing was found; then, with numbers ever lessening, had to take a wide reed-bordered drain on to the river-bank. On this, the ground rang truly again; they could see light, wall-fenced land close by, but between this haven and the field ran the Muldu, swollen and of uncertain depth, under a high bank. Three fields away hounds were streaming across a perfect country. Splash! One brave man sent his horse from the top of the bank into the sullen waters, found unexpectedly sound bottom, and crossed. As he swung



dripping up the far field his back was that of a man who had dared and won.

Scurrying then to catch hounds still driving steadily ahead, but when they reached them, after crossing ground which Meleady subsequently said was only fit for frogs, an' them same light ones, they marked their fox to ground below a rock, with a wild stretch of untilled bank-country before them.

But the unexpected can always be brightly painted; the few who conquered the bog were jubilant. As the dry, wise people, and the wet, foolish ones came gradually up, the last scurry across the sound fields was magnified into a fox-hunt of supreme excellence.

A six-mile jog along lonely roads took them back again, skirting the bog and the river, which they had floundered and splashed across, while the wise people, pointing to sullen water and treacherous slime, talked of the folly of risking sprung hocks and strained backs, while deep in their sore hearts they wished that they had done so. An unriden fox-hunt is the most tantalizing thing on earth.

Second horses waited for them at Tulloun.

Shelia and Aunt Jane went in the motor to it, along a wide road with rocky, overhanging hills at one side, and green boglands spreading by the river at the other. The woods of Tulloun, an old house poised on a high bank above the river, held. Hounds were scarcely in before two foxes loped across the lawn, through another screen of woods, and up to the spinney on a steep hill, with hounds absolutely racing close behind. Here there seemed to be a check, so much so that nearly every one pulled up, standing waiting, when shouts roused them, and they flew along the crest of the hill to see hounds already a mile away, running mute on a



screaming scent and but three men with them. Jack, the second whip, possessed more zeal than voice, so having piped a faint "gone away," he forgot everything except the hounds he loved, and drove his leggy four-year-old away, as close to them as he could keep.

"An' he the biggest ould lad iver ye saw." Whiskin' the tail on him, an' he off across the boggy garden. Hurry on, let ye, ye're late. Well over. Yerra cripes. Well lept!"

The country people, a waving, excited fringe upon a wall, from which they frequently accompanied a loose stone to earth, kept up an eager chorus, as the swearing, furious loiterers charged up.

There was rough, boggy ground, with small treacherous fences to be crossed. Norman let the Collier stretch himself as he endeavoured to catch the flying pack. Shelia, on the grey, was just ahead of him, Nancy Slade to his right.

Doyle, Travers, and Mac being the lucky three who had got away.

After the bog and two fields of rushy, sour pasture, they came to sound going and low fences which could be galloped at. Odds were that their fox was for Ballyhale, two miles away, but he held past it well to the right, bending back as if for Tullyhack, a gorse covert.

Here luck favoured Norman, who headed a panting and aggrieved contingent. He hammered along the road instead of turning in, and having clattered for half a mile, swearing as he went, with everyone behind him chorusing furiously that he was wrong, yet still following him blindly, he turned right-handed to coo out a cheer of triumph, for there was a blissful sight. Hounds swinging down to him but half a field away, dwelling

for a minute in plough as if to let him up. The four, including Jack, were still with them, but no one else had caught up.

They came hunting slowly over the bank on to the grass. Then old Patience had it, then Reveller, and they flung on again, driving in a body, relentless as death. Now the leaders paused, the outside hounds swept in wresting the lead—mad for blood—across light pastures and sound green banks.

Grazing cattle lifted astounded heads, sheep scattered and fled in foolish droves, huddling under fences as the chase flew by.

They were in for a big thing; hearts woke to the joy of it; horses strode forward eagerly, keen as their riders. Fences were ridden at carefully, for the pace had been hot, and a fall meant losing sight of the pied wave sweeping ahead.

Country people ran out to cheer and proffer unheeded advice. He was close upon them. "An' he bate out. Success. Well over!" This was always the last cry as some one jumped.

Over a narrow bank, the Collier, jumping too big, pecked a landing, recovered himself in a second, and strode on, Norman patting his damp, foam-flecked neck. Snatch at his bits and swing of the strong, sloping shoulders as if they had just started. The Collier cantered, when the cocktails were extended.

"Five hundred—a thousand's cheap for you," whispered Norman, with pride. "Steady, old boy, there's a ditch outside—steady." Then "Steady" in earnest as the dreaded line of wire rose, stretched the taking-off side of an open ditch. "Who had nippers? Quick. No need for them." With a "Maybe it's rotten," Meleady flew out at it, caught it on his five-year-old

hind legs, and snap ! it parted with a last outraged—pin-g-g !

“ Thanks to God an’ Guinane’s brother’s bad stuff,” said the dealer, as Norman followed him. “ We’re here yet—there’ll be reshtin’ on the hillside above, I tell ye.”

To the right again now, over a huge double. Shelia, her grey coming at it fast, cried out with horror, for the farmer’s horse turned on the top and slid out right beneath her. But the fired grey had no mind for murder ; he checked himself, jumping away crookedly, a “ divil help me ” now shrilling from under his hind feet. Now it was uphill, straight for the crag-capped summit of Inch Hill. It would be a stout fox if he could cross it. Panting, shambling, shuffling horses took the ascent, falling rather than jumping over the loose walls, and here they mercifully checked. Far back, some not yet beyond the road, came the straggling tail, toy horses, moving with mechanical stiffness. Down the north side, and their fox had sanctuary in front of him—open earths not two miles away ; yet something turned him, twisting among the gorse-fringed banks below the hill ; trying each well-stopped hole and crag, and then up again straight over the top. Men got down and ran, and even the horses stood still, absolutely blown ; with eccentricity of Nature the sides of the hill are in many places boggy quagmires, into which hoofs squelch and stick. Shelia’s grey stood still twice before she got him slowly up, and then rode quietly along the top, thinking the hunt must end—that each moment they must run into an utterly beaten fox.

When hounds, hunting slowly, turned southwards down the hill few troubled to follow them. They looked back, talking of the country they had ridden over ; yet the best of the hunt was still to come. As

hounds left the rough hillside and spread out on a grass-field, scent suddenly improved. Streaming on now like a flock of pigeons, a gleam of sun falling on them as they strained across the flat. To fly downhill and catch them was easy work for those whose horses were still fresh, and they were very few. Shelia, Nancy, Sir Ralph, Norman, Meleady, Mac, and one or two others rode the end of the hunt of their lives. On over sound land, with great sound banks to jump; honest fences to swing at in one's stride, and trust a good horse to get over. No check or falter in the pack, driving steadily, with a murderous chorus as they drew nearer and nearer to their fox.

Easy into the road over a stone wall with a banked top; quietly out of it over a greasy little ditch—Jack's black floundered and all but fell; then on again, the horses striding as if the hunt was just beginning, leaning a little against their bits, but taking their fences as freely as when they started. Down on that wide green bank; it looks big as we gallop at it; it looks bigger as we land on top and see the yawner outside, but the Collier flicks out lightly. Shelia's grey lands with two feet to spare. There is hardly a man who does not speak to his horse, and whisper to himself that no one else on earth owns anything as perfect as this.

Steadily on, with Tulloun woods on their right. Horses falter a little at last. Nancy's thoroughbred flew two banks recklessly; the steel is dying out of them as they gallop on.

More slowly now, as the failing scent of gallant fox, and lower still, twisting down hedges with shouts of "He's just in front" to tell them that he had passed.

Now they viewed him, with bowed back and trailing brush, yet crawling steadily on, the ringing chorus of

death in his dulled ears. No running mute now, but a yelping melody of triumph as they swing close to their prey.

Now he gathered strength for a last effort and eyes were turned away; he had done so much and he must die. With bursting heart, he swung on from the tiring hounds, so that as they mouthed madly at his brush, he put half a field between them. A privet hedge close-clipped lay in front, with a yew tree beyond up which he might climb; he sprang it, thinking to find a bank; the treacherous twigs oozed like water beneath his feet, and his breath was gone. Yet, gallant to the last, he turned to face his foes, and met his teeth in Reveller's neck ere in a snarling, tearing worry he passed, and men sung him a requiem of praise. Grieved even, for the stout thing which was now a tattered nothing. No straight burst or wonderful point, but as a fox-hunt of twelve miles, with that last gallop of over three, almost unsurpassable.

The day had died to a frost-tinged, still evening. Following traps and motor-cars turned up with skill, and they grouped at the gate talking it over.

Pat Maguire, rolling up on a lathered horse, was coldly received as he cried the run down.

"A twisted circle of a thing," he said sourly, "with no pace about it, and hills to throw any man out. Goats we wanted."

"There was plenty on the hill ye were too bate to climb up," grunted Meleady, patting his five-year-old's neck.

Pat hotly retorted that he had got away first and was with hounds for some miles, and Meleady replied mildly that, "until he cot thim himself he couldn't say, but, for sure, he knew who was there thin."

The argument was checked by the hot-footed arrival of an irate countryman claiming damages from the Hunt. "His gardin was destroyed. An' thim that crossed it, he wouldn't mind. But what vexed him out was that Maguire from the hills, that wouldn't lep the fince or turn back, but on his great gebawn of a horse, goin' hither an' over among me cabbages."

When the listeners had finished laughing, Pat, having flung the man something, was far down the road still arguing rancorously with Meleady. A lifelong friendship tottering to its fall. Every one who could find traps or motors drove away.

Near Tulloun they met Aunt Jane and Uncle James wandering gently along the roads, Aunt Jane thrilling to what she had seen of the run. She had even started galloping through a track and timidly scaling a broken-down bank, but later as she trotted along the road luck favoured her. She had seen hounds coming down off the hill, and driving fast across the flat land had urged Sweetlass hard to watch it, so that the mare was quite tired out, hanging her well-bred little head and dragging her feet drearily. And as Tom remarked, "'Twould be a nice thrail home for him that led her."

There were good horses which did not come out for a fortnight after the gallop; few fed for two days, so severe had been the pace and the trial of the hill.

Shelia got in to find Marcus Butler awaiting her. They could not plead for further time, and the hearing of the case—the, for them, hopeless hearing—was fixed for April.

It seemed hard to think of misfortune after such a day's sport, for the pure joy of the chase still throbbed in them, and they were ready to ride each fence, to take each twist and turn again. Now Shelia sighed instead,



sitting gloomily silent. She could hunt, of course, but not with second horses and a motor waiting to come home in. Moderate comfort must always be hers, a cold thing to one who had had more money than she needed from her babyhood. Then the cheery Irish optimism rose in her. The future might take care of itself. Uncle James' cheque would account for at least one winter.

"There's Uncle James . . ." she said, looking at him.

"H'm," said Marcus Butler thoughtfully.

## CHAPTER XI

### HOW MELEADY KEPT HIS OATH

ANDREW MELEADY chewed the cud of his wrath and found it bitter food. Aunt Jane's buying of the sickly chestnut had been manna from heaven to him, and his conscience was in his own mind clear, for he had not lied to her. He had guaranteed no soundness or health of appetite. "But to be," as he told his mother, "down-faced an' tradjuiced before the quality for what he niver did. An' to have ev'ry gintleman in the hunt axin' him why he sthruck the ould Englishman," that rankled—sorely.

Pat was the one who had scored—for the black horse was worth money, and he would have been lucky to get thirty for his grey in a fair.

So the dealer spun nebulous webs and waited . . . quietly.

Now, Mrs. Tom's uncle, by marriage, had a son who had prospered in life and trained at the Curragh. Unkind people made remarks concerning the running of his horses, but he kept within the narrow boundary

of safety, and undoubtedly made a great deal of money for himself and his employers.

Pat, hoping soon to be a rich man, took to running up to the Curragh to stay with his cousin, and, swaggering there as a country gentleman, met a certain general called Sir Charles Appleton, a nasal-voiced, peppery-tempered man, who rode hard to hounds, and would give any reasonable price for a horse which he liked. Pat's descriptions of the wonderful animals at Cahervally so fired him that he promised to write and ask if there was anything really high-class for sale there before he went on leave to England. He would be down inspecting some additions to the barracks after Christmas, and thought he would require one then.

"A horse of style and quality, fit to go in any country. Price in reason . . . no object," he said.

Pat, returning homewards in a first-class carriage, plus one horse and merely minus a signature, cogitated a great deal. Six months before he had gone to an auction and bought there the Rajah, a well-known brown horse, with an almost hopeless back tendon. The Rajah had won several soldiers' races, and was an upstanding blood horse, in the book, with a head well set on, perfect shoulders and quarters, and a tail to his hocks.

"Just the horse to go to England for Sir Charles," thought Pat.

An overbearing master and too much zeal across the banks had resulted in the strain which sent the Rajah limping sorely, to Toomey's auction, there to change hands for ten pounds, and to vanish from view into the stables of Pat Maguire.

The ordinary skill of the veterinary surgeon was a wraith before Andy's knowledge. He squinted his

one whole eye, fingered his upper lip, and set to work. The leg was boiled and bathed and bandaged, and boiled again, and stood in swift-running water until the bowed tendon straightened slowly, and after five minutes' walking exercise both fore legs were flat and clean enough to have deceived the most suspicious vet. The Rajah now walked quietly in the back paddock, hidden from all public view, until such time as Pat meant to slip him off to a distant fair and get perhaps a hundred on him.

The name, "the Rajah," was of course a thing unheard at Clonmony. By way of contrast the handsome brown was now known as Mickey Magee, and that only to Andy. "The name," as Pat remarked to himself, grinning, "of the chap he was bought from." The whip-tail was squared and slightly shortened; the distinguishing mark of three white legs was so common a thing that his new owner hoped no one would ever recognize the thoroughbred.

"Me friend, Sir Charrles," was now for ever on Pat's lips. "Him an' me havin' tea together at the officers' mess," he said to Mac; glowering furiously when Mac, feigning deafness, said absently, "It was wonderful how civilized those sergeant fellows were getting when they rose to afternoon tea."

Pat's purple-hued fury being his reward.

Notwithstanding Forefront, Mac was melancholy. Creditors pressed him with anxious insistence. His house looked more ruinous than ever in the wet winter weather. South-west gales hustled fresh slates from the roof, heavy rains leaked through rotting ceilings, spreading great stains upon the plaster, peeling off dejected paper from the walls.

He could hear steps rustling, when he went to bed,

through the echoing emptiness of the staircase and wide corridors—rustling and stirring, until one could imagine ghostly dresses slipping across the boards—hushed spectral voices whispering disgustedly of the ruin they saw.

Even with Forefront's earnings, he wondered if he could ever make the place a fit habitation for bright, pretty Nancy, and hear her light feet patter on the old polished stairs.

Dinners of rabbits and game were more and more frequent. "The butcher had," Mary said, "'sthruck,' declining credit—the upsthart son to him that killed ye father's mate for years," she murmured tearfully, breaking the news when Mac pleaded for chops. "But if ye give me five shillin', Masther Murrough, I'll bring a stripped rack from the city for ye."

So Murrough Macnamara sighed in his huge house—sighed, where once he had laughed and made light of his misfortunes.

Excepting Forefront, a very blight seemed to have descended upon his stables. Kissing Gate, a young mare, caught a chill from a leaking roof, and would not be out for months; Dandy, his own black, cut his stifle open. Fairway, another, broke down, and had to be fired. He had to fall back upon raw three-year-olds and see the hunt slipping away from him, as the youngsters floundered and sprawled. He saw little of Nancy; the roads were too muddy for bicycling, and the chauffeur was no keeper of secrets; while out hunting she was haunted by the irrepressible company of Mr. Pat Maguire, who languished and ogled and paid fulsome compliment by her side at every check and wait. He was for ever offering lifts in "me pony trap" between coverts, proffering light refreshment from a

huge basket. "Little cakes over from London as light and sweet as yourself." A taste of cherry brandy . . . a thimbleful . . . to put life into her; for ever consulting her tastes, and praising her riding, with a sublime indifference of hearty snubs and the rancorous interference of Mac whenever he appeared.

"The poor little fellow in his old tumble-down house," said Pat, all genial pity. "Did you hear now, Miss Slade, he had his eye on the widow Carty, that has cry money enough to start him with?"

Though a look at the widow Carty's ponderous back view, bumpeting crookedly just in front, might have reassured any one . . . Nancy was young and in love—sufficiently so to weigh the joys of immediate gold and the sorrows of indefinite waiting, and, in consequence, to snap furiously at Mac when that youth, riding a raw, light chestnut, and bemuddled by three falls, trotted up. After all . . . he had never spoken openly. . . .

His retiring, surprised and hurt, and subsequent acceptance of a sandwich from Mrs. Carty's case, was proof to a galled spirit.

The glare with which she honoured the unoffending stout lady was almost murderous; her equally bitter one at Mac when he came again to speak to her would have been open proof of some fancied injury to any one save a dispirited lover.

Having spoken, he sneezed, and Miss Slade, staring between her mare's ears, suggested cough lozenges.

"It's the roof." Mac sneezed again. "The wind couldn't let well alone, but must take the slates off above my room last night—finding me asleep and unsuspecting. I was green mould when I woke and moved my bed."

Miss Slade coldly suggested he should mend it at once, lest Mrs. Carty should take cold ; and Mac, finding the remark ambiguous, coughed, gently this time, observing that he did not know that the lady was coming to stay.

"She'd never find a place big enough to keep dry in if she did," said Mac, eyeing the widow's ample form. "I declare that poor horse bows to the ground when she starts him, he's so rubbed round the saddle."

Observing that he need not talk nonsense to her, Nancy shivered at a whip of cold wind, inquired when the wedding was to be, and rode off, leaving Mr. Macnamara gloomier than ever, and not enlightened, for he knew that Mrs. Carty's bank-book, or her happy, good-tempered self, had won her a cousin of her own, and they were to be married in the spring.

A habitually sunny man rode back, having missed two good runs, beclouded in mist of gloom ; uncheered by the presence of Uncle James and Pat Maguire, talking earnestly in front of him, and further on Norman and Shelia, riding silently, for they too were sorrowful.

Miss Slade, in an acute bad humour, having been whisked away in her own motor.

Pat turned as they passed Dunmore gates.

"Macnamara, Sir Charles will be with me to lunch on Thursday. I'd take it friendly if you'd come over. Mr. and Miss Slade are coming—and I'll try for an officer."

"And Timsey Hassett—did you ask him ?" queried Mac gloomily.

At any other time he would have tendered an impolite refusal, but his present humour made anything better than loneliness. Also, Nancy was to be there. He might take opportunity to force an explanation of



her manner to him. So, having allowed the flush of fury to die, he flung a bare-picked "thank you" at Pat's head and went on.

A cold, drizzling rain hid the world, shrouding the green fields, the big banks he loved to ride over. It dripped in dreary cadence from every twig and bough, the mud squelching soddenly beneath the youngster's feet. Cows lowed mournfully in the chilling mist, his three-year-old tired and stumbled. He looked at his open front gates, their broken hinges dooming them to perpetual hospitality. There was no laughter to-night as he fumbled at the bars which kept the cattle in, and walked soberly instead of cantering across to the swing-gate. Decay, desolation, failure; they had never seemed so close, so hopelessly inevitable.

Untrimmed boughs lashed at him wetly. A lake of surface water gleamed at the edge of the unkept gravel. Fallen slates crunched snappily below the chestnut's weary feet. He was almost surprised to hear no particular tale of woe when he walked under the ringing old archway into the clearing before his stables. The mare was no worse—better, if anything—there was no tale of death or disaster—not outside, but thin envelopes left unopened that morning still lay upon his untidy table.

Mac opened them listlessly. The coal merchant sent a long bill, with "Final Application" scrawled in red across its foot. The Cahervally grocer threatened the law. The butcher refused more credit. All his patient tradespeople seemed to have turned into ravening wolves. Mac thought quietly as he flung the letters into the cheerful fire. He had never cleared up any debt, but on the other hand each cheque he received paid toll to each account he owed; and, knowing this,

no one had ever pressed him. Now some influence, stronger than his own, worked against him. Mac laughed drearily. Pat Maguire disliked him, owed him a grudge. Pat was cousin to the coal merchant, close relation to the angry grocer. There were other letters even more important; certain mortgages were being called in, even his lands were threatened. Perhaps Pat, not finding Clonmony large enough, cast an envious glance at the tumble-down old castle. The square residence which had once held the Maguire's stewards was not aristocratic enough for him.

With a bitter gulp of sheer weariness Mac's head went down between his hands, and he sat steaming in his damp clothes until Mary chased him off to dress.

Dinner in a cold dining-room was no cheerier. A small wood fire flickered in the huge old-fashioned grate, the lamps made mere spots of light in the gloom. Man wearies of rabbit soup, of rabbit, unpleasantly human, veiled in white sauce—of buttered egg with no anchovy beneath. Mac sat thinking far into the night, while the insidious drizzle crawled through his open-work roof, and in working downwards tore off fresh strips of paper, new lumps of rotting plaster, in the disused rooms.

A west wind, rising with the dawn, blew the mist away. Soft sunshine warmed the land when Mac drove—a faint sneer upon his lips—to Clonmony.

Here Mr. Pat Maguire had been up since daylight, full of wise schemes. That good horse, Mickey Magee—late the Rajah—had gone forth in the cold darkness of the dawning, passing, hooded and sheeted and bandaged, along lonely roads to Meleady's, where Sir Charles was to see him. Two days before Pat, con-

veniently forgetting all past disagreements, had gone to the horse dealer's explaining the case to him. "Ask what you think best, and anything over one hundred and fifty pounds you can keep for yourself," whispered Pat, afraid the very walls might hear. He thought the Rajah would fetch ten or twenty pounds beyond that sum.

Meleady looked at him gently, refusal upon his tongue; then his face grew brighter, and he nodded his head without comment.

Pat drew up the scheme. The Rajah was to arrive before any one was up, to be received by Meleady himself, and no man was to know whence he came—to be called Mickey Magee, as a suitable name for a farmer's horse.

That was all over, but social duties pressed upon Pat as he scurried round the place. Stables were being cleaned out; the manure heap in the centre of the yard hidden with a collection of farm machines. Andy had cut himself shaving, and was consequently peevish, while indoors Violet and Rosie tortured the cook to a white heat of helplessness as they fussed about her. Their brief acquaintance with the world had imbued them with ideas as composite as the drawing-room furniture; they were only firm as to one thing, that all dishes must be of a light variety and handed round. No great joint, suggesting a semblance of early dinner, should smoke at their luncheon party. They pondered over elaborate recipes, adopting the plan of leaving out anything which they did not possess. Sweets, almonds, bought cakes, jam, and cheese bestrewed the elaborate, orange-hued table-centre; the parlourmaid was sulkily confused by the time the first peal at the bell made Violet say "God Almighty" and powder her nose

only on one side, and Rosie, who was downstairs, stuff her apron behind a sofa-cushion and sit on three chairs running, in her excitement. Mrs. Tom, sternly ordered never to get beyond "How d'ye do," was blackly enconscd on the Sheraton couch, a bonnet protecting her head, and a new novel in her work-stained fingers.

Punctual guests streamed in in a body, Sir Charles bringing a vet, who was left callously outside, the surrounding and isolation of Mrs. Tom being skilfully managed; and every one was beaming when the brass gong was thumped in spasmodic jars, and the marshalling to luncheon became imperative. At this Rosie got behind Violet, and Violet near Pat, and they were torn between the taking of arms and the awful thought that perhaps mamma would have to come into the picture. The guests stared politely at a yawning door, and a deep voiced boomed across the strained silence.

"Walk in like the ducks . . . let ye . . ." said Mrs. Tom contemptuously, thus starting a somewhat confused flock towards the dining-room. Mrs. Tom, coming last, stalked gloomily to the head of her table, looking shrewdly at the gap left between her place and the nearest guest. There had been no such gap in the stuffy sitting-room at her little house in the hills, when genial Father Halliman had come to early dinner. There at least three dishes of meat, flanked by potatoes and cabbages, had smoked substantially upon the table, instead of almonds and cakes and jam.

It is unfortunate that the leaving out of items in elaborate recipes should completely alter the made dishes—the chicken mayonnaise, without salad oil, was pungent to the nostrils and taste, a thing to be

hidden beneath its bed of salad and left untasted. The moulds fell out in a wobble of uncertainty ; the notion of substituting lumps of currant jelly for cherries in the whipped cream turned it to a guilty pink, so that it sat blushing, waiting for its turn.

When the guests had hidden the chicken, and wondered what on earth the moulds and curry were made of, and felt exceedingly hungry, the door flew open with a bang to admit the smart parlourmaid, bearing a laden tray and a savoury trail of hot food. A huge goose smoked upon one dish, the other bore a monster piece of boiled bacon, ensconced in a bed of cabbage.

"Anna Kate," cried Rosie, horrified.

For the first time during luncheon Mrs. Tom spoke.

"Seeing the bits and scraps, I thought some might be hungry," she said simply.

They were ; they smiled upon their hostess.

There were tears in the eyes of the Misses Cassidy when Sir Charles, having shamelessly declared he ordered goose, the big dish was plumped down amid almonds and cakes, and Mrs. Tom carved it deftly, adding to each helping slices of bacon and mounds of cabbage. The moulds, the yellow curry, the variety of ambitious dishes were waved away. Rosie hung over the chicken until vinegar fumes rose to her head, Violet ate indefinite mould, but their luncheon party was spoilt for them.

The others, on the contrary, thawed to merry conversation, and finished up with cake and jam and biscuits, heartlessly leaving the self-conscious whipped cream alone.

Mrs. Tom spoke once again when Sir Charles asked for a second helping, and commended the excellent bird.

"One of my own rearing," she said briefly, "fattened on oats. Try it on your own, General——" She



silenced to a lightning glance from her daughters ; but Sir Charles said he certainly would.

Mac, eyeing him curiously, wondered what Pat was about to sell to him, but said nothing, except that he had never seen the horse they spoke of.

"Meleady only has him a few days," explained Pat, with so much easy candour that Mac nearly disgraced himself by winking.

Miss Nancy Slade was frigid and aloof. Sitting next to Pat, she talked to him pleasantly, crumbling her bread, eating nothing, and flinging fiery glances towards Mac, as he made sarcastic love to the downcast Rosie.

Sir Charles, bustling to see his horse, was in excellent humour after a glass of full-bodied port. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, hook-nosed, with keen grey eyes under overhanging grey eyebrows, and a manner of considering, before they spoke, that all men must be about to give the wrong decision, and therefore it was not worth while listening to them. Superficially, he was a good judge of a horse, but biased by too much paper knowledge of points ever to buy an ugly workman ; but he was prepared to pay a price, and generally got hold of something fairly useful.

He explained in the hall, as Pat's car came round, of his unsuccessful visits to several dealers. "Nothing my class at all," he said, bidding au revoir to his gloomy hostess, who said "How are ye?" abstractedly.

Mac succeeded in pushing Nancy apart from the others, and stood looking at her sternly.

"What do you mean by it?" he asked. "Eh? Butchers, coal-merchants, mortgages. Now you——?"

Miss Slade, blinking haughtily, wondered what he meant. As to the bills, Mrs. Carty would pay those.



Light dawned upon Mac's quiet face ; he gave a short, quick laugh.

"Some people," he said placidly, "have got no sense." That was all ; but he squeezed her hand with sudden warmth, and the girl, looking at him wistfully, was no longer frigid.

The men got upon the car—Pat and the vet, who was soured by lack of food, on one side, Sir Charles upon the other. Pat drove a lumpy bay mare, who pounded at lightning speed along the narrow roads, while his guest, holding to the straps, listened to various cautions.

"He'll show you a lot of queer ones first, but I'll give you a bit of a nudge when we come to the right one. Don't be put off, because I know he had another buyer. This is the right sort—your class."

As they swung through the bog near Meleady's, Sir Charles revealed the sterner side of his nature—his Saxon horror of shady transactions. "I've taken a man into court," he said fiercely, "for cheating me, and won my case. My God, Maguire, we were all but into the ditch !"

For Pat had struck the mare, and her answering swerve had for a moment poised Sir Charles over a horrifying vista of clear brown-hued water, deep and cool.

"It's a way she has of shying," said Pat equably. "And here we are !" They stopped at the iron gate, the bay mare ramping through with a clatter, and were greeted by Meleady.

"Oh, yes, Misther Maguire said he'd be over." He had a few horses, sure enough. "Open up that dour, Mike boy."

Mike boy, a youth of some sixty summers, with the

tale of his downfall painted fiercely upon his short nose, obeyed, displaying a hairy-heeled, ponderous grey, the sort of brute which might get over two fences, but was bound to come down and lie on its rider at the third. It wheeled with a snort in its box, Sir Charles, with one glance of disapproval, following its example.

"More quality," said Meleady thoughtfully. "Well, here now. Mickey, sthrip the bay."

A mealy bay, light-middled and cow-hocked, and a straight-shouldered, coachy black, with wear and tear points about him, were next shown. The black had contracted feet and suspicious marks of blistering about the coronet. A fourth, a skinny chestnut mare, with slim legs and a sulky eye, made Sir Charles impatient. His first glance at her head had made him fear she was the plum.

With considerable sharpness he said he wanted a blood horse and nothing else. "Useful brutes enough," he said, eyeing the chestnut disgustedly, "but not my stamp."

Meleady chewed a straw and looked pensively towards a closed door.

"I have thim same," he said slowly; "but there's money to be paid for thim."

"That horse you got in Kerry?" said Pat, winking at Sir Charles. "He's not sold, is he?"

"Yes, that one—no, he's here yet." Meleady opened the door, went in, and took off a rug.

There, polished as a mirror, littered to his hocks, just in from half an hour's walking, stood the Rajah. A great, slashing brown thoroughbred, with faultless shoulders, and galloping quarters and hocks; a lean, well-bred head, perfectly set on, and a good-tempered eye.

"Ah!" said Sir Charles, partly from pleasure and partly because Pat's elbow caught him hard upon the ribs.

"There's the boyo," whispered Pat excitedly. "There's your horse at last."

"Mickey Magee, I calls him," said Meleady easily, "afther me cousin's uncle, be marriage, that I bought him from. Clap a bridle on him, Mike, and take him out. He was a queer chance, ye see. Mickey bought an old casht race-mare, that they thought'd breed no more, an' afther all she was in foal, and with this one. Well, he laid no sthore to him, but ploughed an' carred him, until lasht week, whin I saw him, and bought him. There's nothin' known of his breedin', save that he shud be in the book somewhere—an' havin' a conscience, I paid the man a fair price, an' here ye are."

"He's extraordinarily like the Sahib's," murmured Sir Charles; "just their stamp."

A flicker of fear crossed Pat's face. The Rajah was by the Sahib.

"And wonderfully well done," went on Sir Charles.

"Mickey was a warrum man," said Meleady easily. "Jog him on, Mike." Through it all he completely ignored sundry side grins from Pat.

Head and tail up, the Rajah jogged level as a dream, throwing his feet out with the true thoroughbred action, low and straight, and Sir Charles' eyes caught fire. Deep heart—good bone—the Rajah seemed to lack nothing. He saw the horse galloped and jumped, he got up himself, to find a perfect ride, a mouth no man could cavil at; and as he pulled up, and touched the curb lightly to see the horse bend his lean neck, he never even queried when Meleady asked him two hundred and eighty.

It was Pat Maguire's mental thermometer which fell to zero.

"An' examine him away," said the dealer, "if ye wish for him."

Wish for him! Sir Charles took another canter for the pure pleasure of it. To feel the resolute reaching stride beneath him, the hold which was just enough to promise keenness against his hands; he skimmed the stone wall, flashed over the open ditch, and a tenner back for luck was all he asked for.

The sour vet, setting to work, could find no fault. Meleady, seeing his pinched face, had sent him in for a drink, so the world was mellowed to him by whisky and water. Still he strove honestly before he wrote Mickey Magee, late the Rajah, down as sound in wind and limb, and in half an hour's time the brown was stepping proudly towards Cahervally to be entrained for Dublin.

Sir Charles bubbled with pride as they rattled back to catch his train. Sometimes he rhapsodized aloud, and sometimes fell into silent dreams of leading the field in Leicestershire. He bade good-bye to Pat with many thanks, and, what Pat valued more, pressing invitations to lunch and dine with him at the Curragh in the spring.

Mac, meeting the horse in the dusk, looked at him curiously; he was hooded and sheeted and bandaged, so that no man could see him, but his white hind legs showed in the failing light.

"I'd give a sovereign to see one more," muttered Mac to himself. He had seen the Rajah sold at the auction.

Meleady, left alone, smiled almost seraphically.

No prouder man than Pat Maguire ever mounted a horse next morning, as he set out for Meleady's. The deal had been successful beyond all his dreams; the

large surplus would atone to Meleady for any little difference they had had over the grey. His next visit to the Curragh promised to be a pleasant one; so, whistling tunefully, Pat walked and cantered, looking round him idly with no thought for the grey beauty of the morning. Pearly masses of vapour rolled and billowed in the sky, touched here and there by faint gleams of sunshine. Silence brooded across the world, deepest of all in the heart of the bog, with its stacks of turf, its still, mysterious pools and coarse ochre-hued grasses. Fields with no sign of life save grazing cattle and sheep stretched round it, and beyond were the line of hills, blue, grey, and hazy. They rose on every side, one chain lapping to another, a rugged rim about a saucer of green-turfed land—the most perfect hunting country in the world.

Hard things to climb when one ran to the saucer's brim, and struggled over stones and bog and heather, but sanctuaries for the stout hill foxes which increased and multiplied in the endless cover.

Pat gathered his black horse together, shot along a strip of grass, and turned in at Meleady's gate. The horse dealer was standing in his yard watching the backing of a well-bred brown colt. He nodded to Pat, sent away the horse, and asked Pat carelessly what he could do for him. His manner was curiously remote; his face devoid of the delightful smiles which Pat had expected.

"It came off splendid, didn't it?" Pat got down. "Too well for yourself, indeed. Aren't you prayin' for me now? He gave a great price."

Meleady looked pleasant. "Meanin' the brown horse?" he remarked. "I'm obliged to ye for the buyer—yes——"

"And I'd like my hundred and fifty," said Pat, "being a bit short."

Meleady looked at him with abstraction. "What hundred and fifty?" he asked in puzzled tones.

"For the horse," said Pat sharply.

Meleady shook his head. "Mickey Magee's brown horse that I sould yestherday, and cashed the cheque for this morning?—sending the man in to do it—I know nothin' about a hundred and fifty pounds. What have ye to do with him, Pat? Of course, I'll not deny ye a commission."

When Pat got his breath he stared at Meleady and said it was a fine joke, while the horse dealer observed politely that some was easy to amuse.

He was unmoved when Pat broke into a storm of abuse, when he raved, threatened, cursed. Meleady sat upon a wall and smoked placidly. He said, "it fairly bate him to know why Misther Pat Maguire should demand so large a commission. Was it mad he was? Didn't he know the brown horse came up from Kerry? Didn't he hear him tell the sthory!"

"Kerry me aunt!" yelled Pat. "An' what became, thin, of the horse Andy brought over in the morning?"

"Maybe he's in a bog-hole," suggested Meleady. "When Andy has a drop in he might be careless-like. I think I did hear some nisin' that night." He passed by foaming threats, he smiled in Pat's face, repeating that he knew nothing of any arrangement, that he had sold his own horse, and Pat was welcome to tell his story when and where he chose. By this time Pat, too overcome to stand, also sat upon the wall, as the helplessness of his case steeplechased through his unhappy brain.

To flare the story abroad would be to disgrace himself



utterly : to face Sir Charles' fury, and the amused scorn of the Cahervally Hunt.

"There was a matther of a grey horse I was black-guarded over," said the horse dealer smoothly, as he watched Pat stamp madly to his horse.

Light dawned upon Pat. Something that was almost admiration crept into his furious eyes.

"Ye—had that in for me? Ye damn rogue, ye have me bested!" he almost wailed in broadest brogue.

"I'm only remindin' ye," said Meleady happily, watching his late friend gallop through the bog, beating the astounded black horse as he went.

When they were out of sight Meleady returned to his house, entered his whisky-perfumed back parlour, and studied a banker's receipt for two hundred and seventy pounds sterling with an expression which was scarcely earthly.

The only further news of the Rajah was a letter some two weeks later from Sir Charles Appleton to Pat, stating that he had been delighted with the Irish horse, but, unfortunately, the animal struck into a tendon during his only day's hunting, and was now laid up.

A second letter received by Pat the day following his unexpected reverse nearly deprived him of his reason. It contained a greasy, frayed one-pound note, enfolded in a half-sheet of dirty note-paper, which bore the words, "Commission for bringing a buyer for Mickey Magee.—M. Meleady."

When Rosie, looking at Pat's purple face, and taking the hue for that of joyful surprise, said playfully she wished one would send her that sort of a letter, something seemed to strain to breaking point in Pat's head. Lest it should give way, he suddenly smashed the teapot down upon its stand, looked gravely at the steaming

stain on the cloth, soaking the dirty note to pulp, as gravely wished that Rosie's fool's head had borne the blow, and then suddenly whirled from the room, tears in his eyes, spluttering helpless fury.

Meleady had kept his oath.

## CHAPTER XII

### CHRISTMAS—AND A DEER HUNT

"Memory . . . slipping back upon the golden days ;  
The nakedness and vacancy  
Of the dark, deserted house."—*Tennyson*.

SOMEWHERE in the Dark Ages, which we cannot remember, the greatest unbeliever on earth—a shopkeeper no doubt, by trade—laid a humorous finger to his nose and invented Christmas boxes. There is a season we should think softly of, swept away and made hateful by a crowded week of lavish expenditure. The very rich do not want presents, the poor cannot afford them. . . . To curates and maidens sneezing from draughty churches it is an impressionable sketch of cotton-wool and prickles, framed by whatever texts suit the height of the church's convictions. The householder asked to describe this foundation-stone of our faith would do so glumly, as one of joy for shop messengers.

"Please, sir, the baker's Christmas box, and would ye not keep him waitin', for he can hardly sthand above on his feet, and has half his loaves pavin' the road. Please, sir, Timsey Dunne has brought ye a rabbit. Please, sir, the tay an' the sugar an' the mate is all outside, an' would ye go out and soort it out. Please, sir, the butcher's boy from Tulloun is outside."

Packets of tea and sugar, various-sized lumps of beef, were piled upon the kitchen table at Dunmore, and Shelia had to spend a heated morning giving them away to the labourers' wives and daughters and men themselves. There was an entertainment for the children, at which Desmond presided joyfully, being afterwards washed for quite an hour.

Up to this year, Shelia had enjoyed Christmas in an old-fashioned, childish fashion. There were no empty chairs for memory to fill, save old Moore's who was gently mourned. No bitter thinking of what next year might bring, no fear of scattered households or bitter weariness of regret. Until now. . . . Next year, when economy was imperative, would some of those wrinkled faces gloom greyly in the workhouse, because she could keep their useless old husbands no longer? Would kindly, gnarled hands, which had swung her, as a child, to the plough-horses' backs to ride proudly home, set her driving the hay-racks, holding her safely on, be idle, helplessly, miserably dependent, working no longer? There was so little they could do now, no one else would employ them. Chop a little wood, argue with the younger men—take charge of oats and hay, anything to make them feel themselves of importance. So many had none to help them, strong sons and daughters being sucked down in the American maelstrom. Soft old voices, mumbling toothlessly now, which had whispered to her of the "doatiest little nesht and two blue eggs in it below in the shrubbery," which had told her strange tales of the red-capped leprechauns, warned her that she must not dig primroses from the rath, but only pick their soft-scented blossoms. If the land must be let for grazing, what would become of all the useless and beloved horde?

Some, of course, were part of the place itself, others—or the hunting—must go.

Shelia almost fancied they looked wistfully at her as they crowded for their Christmas dole. So many of the women who came late and went early, absolutely unneeded now that machinery took the place of hands.

"A happy Christmas, ma'am, an' many of them! God bless an' save ye an' spahre ye long to us!"

There were tears to be wiped away as Shelia's strong slender hands held out the parcels. It seemed so hard to think of others suffering.

Mac, alone in his damp house, had his small part of giving before he came to stay at Dunmore. A yearling filly had to change ownership to provide his pensioners—very few in number—with their dinner. A new butcher would have been employed had not the other arrived himself, on the verge of tears, to say he had listened to silly talk and would go on thrustin' Mither Murrough till the Lord called him.

A fiver of the filly's price and a glass of whisky reduced him to open misery and a confidential mind, which enlightened Mac on several points. Also, the fact that the fit of penitence was largely due to his "upsthart" relative, Pat, having passed him without so much as a nod when walking with Nancy Slade.

"An' she herself to shalute me, civil as be damned," said the offended man of meat. "I tell ye, Mither Murrough, I have a fine bill to lash into Clonmony one fine mornin'. Mate tay they have there, I think, with all they're afther usin'."

Mac left his lonely old place to blink its Christmas through in dreary, fireless silence, with only the old couple in the kitchen to tell it was inhabited. Green, unraked gravel, where not so many years ago carriages

had rattled round on Christmas Day to take the Macnamaras to church. Grandmamma, Lady Eliza, in rich furs; grandpapa, an untitled magnate, unashamed of the seemingly endless family which overflowed in the landau and wagonette.

A high-nosed, foolishly haughty looking man, his picture hung in the dining-room, whose reckless extravagance had left his descendants in poverty.

"The coach for the afternoon, Duggan, to drive to see her ladyship's mother. The greys? Yes, the greys—they would do."

"Now, go on please!" from the carriage.

"Yes, me lady."

Down to church to overflow again the big, square pew with its brass tablets, recording the virtues of dead Macnamaras, holly-framed upon the wall.

"Unto us a son is born" laid in crooked prickles before grandfather's nose, a subject of such common occurrence that he clearly took it for personal laudation. Less so, perhaps, if he pricked his thumb upon a holly leaf. Oh, mighty people, the Macnamaras then! . . . Greeting of brother squires at the church door in the soft, cold weather; talking of the next fox-hunt; arranging a grand dinner for New Year's Day. Grandfather, weary of greys, thought he would have a blue roan team. Back again with clatter of hoofs and roll of wheels to a mighty Christmas lunch; to waste and extravagance in kitchen and dining-place. Grandpapa had built the now disused fountains in my lady's garden, had added to the house, to the gardens. Money spent as though it grew as a reed; and now, one solitary Macnamara, last of his race, quiet and downcast, getting into an old dogcart, to drive an awkward, half-broken mare, unclipped and undocked, away from his ruinous

home. Out past the unkempt pleasure gardens, the ever empty fountains, waiting for the broken swing-gate to be lifted up and opened. How small a portion of the money, rioted through by spendthrift grand-papa, would have kept this quiet young fellow ; repaired at least a portion of his huge house.

Uncle James, at this festive season, displayed a generosity worthy of him. Christmas Day fell on a Monday, and on the Saturday he had gone to Cahervally, returning with endless packages of presents. A diamond brooch for Shelia, a locket for Aunt Jane, a pin for Norman. Toys for Desmond, dresses for the maids. Norman's opinion of his endless riches rose to giddy heights as he fingered Shelia's brooch.

"Hannan charged him twenty pounds for that," he said.

Mac looked up suddenly. "He didn't get anything away then ? " he said.

"No," said Norman. "What do you mean ? "

"Oh—nothing," said Mac quietly. His own Christmas was strangely cheered by some weird little enamel clips, absolutely useless for anything, which had tumbled out of a small red box. Having tried them as everything, except paper-weights, he put them back in his pocket, and wrote to Nancy to say he had never wanted anything so much in his life.

Uncle James' munificent presents for the house had not so far been extended to the yard. Tom, having minded the pig-eyed grey for some months, and by skilful exercise and soft feeding reduced him to a state of obedience, showed an expression of such expectancy that Uncle James looked at him uneasily ; then, having routed among his goods in the house, produced a silver pin, which he presented impressively—together



with a lightly veiled hint of great reward at the end of the season.

"An' a happy Christmas to ye," said Tom coldly, as, with the courtesy of his race, he affixed the pin in his tie.

"The mane little animal," was what he said to Mickey later. "That, an' I doin' all I can for that grey devarasion of a horse that should be pulling a barge up an' down the canal."

"The masther's oats, an' the masther's hay," observed Mickey. "I wondther when he'll get paid for thim same."

It was not greed upon the groom's part, for when Miss Jane tendered him half a crown he thanked her heartily.

"The poor little scrag of a thing; but she's fond of the mare," he said to himself; "and thankful to me for what I does for her."

Maria, it is to be feared, was not so easily charmed by the same offering. "With her tablets an' her tay, an' her tongue laid on to ye eviry minnit of a hour," murmured the wrathful handmaid. "Nothing but the missus 'd kape me here a day."

The beaming arrival of the postman, very early, having been severely criticized by Miss Jane at breakfast, Maria was doubly injured.

"Knowin' ye'd want yer letthers, I slipped Clonmony an' Brady's, an' med up here," he announced, as he pocketed his half-sovereign.

If Maria had not suppressed several letters addressed to the Postmaster-General, it is doubtful if Martin would have still been in his situation.

His retiring to the back with Maria and remaining in the pantry did not seem to promise a speedy post for Clonmony and other spots.

Christmas that year came weeping with a soft drizzle of fine rain, and banked clouds low upon the earth. The world was muffled to silence behind a misty veil. There was no whisper of wind in the trees, no drip even of the too gentle rain. Voices by the roadside, as they drove to church, rang hollowly, as though from a distance ; half-seen fields stretched, seemingly limitless, to shrouded hedges. The fog was in the church, in the parson's brain, as he stumbled through a machine-made sermon. Waiting horses coughed and steamed ; the donkeys, gathered round the chapel, brayed in discordant sorrow.

Dunmore was a meeting-place on Christmas Day ; people came damply, depressed and befogged, to steam in the bright, old-fashioned room.

Donovan O'Grady had never missed a Christmas there, growing older and leaner, and more gnarled year by year ; he often looked wistfully at Shelia's smooth face, wondering how he had dreamt of marrying her. Travers and Kane Norton, his eyeglass fixed. Dunmore seemed elastic in the number of rooms it could provide.

Maria, hustled to a state of beaming geniality, showed her true worth as she made preparation.

Debts, difficulties, forebodings vanished when so many hunting people gathered about a huge wood fire, drinking hot tea and eating cakes which Anne, the departed cook, had returned herself to make.

O'Grady's snarl—a snarl only surface-deep—generally dominated the conversation. “ Chapel,” he said, “ had been made a sorrow to him by clamouring claimants for dead fowl—there was one,” he laughed, “ Mrs. Grady, whose gander was whipped a week on Tuesday, and she wouldn't have troubled me at all but for the six lone widdies walkin' around the yard. And there's

master threatening us all with the law if the fox crosses his bit of land again. He has a strip, you know, just where we drop down off Craik Hill, one field wide and three long, yet we always cross a corner of it. He'll be at you, Norman, next Friday, after the hunt. It's your country—your land round it." Then came a message from Mickey: "He was away to his cousins beyant the hills, an' had a rabbit home with him for Masther Desmond."

"White as the dribbled snow," proclaimed Mickey proudly, as he reft the lop-eared thing from its basket and dropped it callously upon the floor. Unabashed, it hopped about them, with a bravery telling of a happy life.

"Not a shade on him but the blush about his eye, an' he tame an' all."

Desmond's raptures were unstinted. Sounds of shrill kitchen's revelry came from below; above the tales of horse and hunts rose thick as the tobacco smoke. In some fashion a whisper of Meleady's revenge had drifted out. Pat had flung out some words of wrath before a stable boy, Meleady's Mickey had hinted, grinning.

They had it now, worrying it to death, heedless of Uncle James' pricked ears.

"It's almost too good to be true. You see, on account——" Here they remembered, and dropped their voices.

Then a thunderclap burst upon their gossips. "Mr. Maguire," said Peter peevishly.

As mist rolls up before the sun, so geniality was licked away by Pat's presence. The merry, good-natured hunting gossip ceased. The men greeted him stiffly, looking at Shelia.

"Came over to wish you all the compliments of the

season." Pat stared at them; he was in his newest tweeds; he was young and floridly handsome; yet, looking uneasily at O'Grady's shabby suit, his grey head and rugged face, some dim knowledge that he could never look well-bred made Pat assertively peevish as he sat down. He had a box of what he called sweeties for Desmond, and gratitude had to be forthcoming.

"Over from London I got them," he said. "I sent Miss Slade a great heap of them, too," he added carelessly—"she being fond of sweeties—in a grand sort of a box."

"That was thoughtful of you," said Mac, coldly furious. "Tell me"—rancour led him straight to the attack—"we were talking of the Rajah—the brown horse you bought at Harty's—have you got him still?"

"I sold him a year ago," said Pat, flushing darkly. What could Mac know? "Why?"

"Only I could have sworn I saw him on the road the day I lunched with you. He has two peculiar white hind legs—right up to his hocks."

Pat, squirming visibly, said sulkily, "There were other horses with white hind legs." His visit was proving unpleasant. If they were to find out, he would never hear the end of it. "And is Forefront sound yet?" he retaliated sourly.

"Like your Rajah, he's gone from me," said Mac drily, "until I want him."

The budding quarrel was arranged by the white rabbit, which had lopped, unnoticed, on to a sofa, and sat directly behind Pat, a paw distinctly held to its twitching nose. This derisive act was too much for politeness. A howl of laughter greeted the rabbit, sending Pat to his feet looking sulkily about him, requesting to know how he had amused them.

Receiving a lame explanation with clear disbelief, he talked bigly for a short period, and finding his boasting flat, departed, Norman hoping politely they would meet at the deer hunt next day.

"Quinlan's hunt," he said. "We're all invited. He has, he says, to bring the racehorses, for nothin' else will save us."

This pleasant parting was powerless to salve Pat's hurt feelings; he bade good-bye to the circle, which he knew would commence to talk again directly he left, glared at Mac across a cold meeting of fingers, and vanished high-shouldered and sulky into the dripping gloom outside.

"If one could walk round this room and find the old papers, the man might come here to amuse us," snarled O'Grady; "but as it is, with his fine talk of winning cups, and second horses, and the motor he means to buy . . . he has spoilt the evening for me."

O'Grady went sharply round the room, tweaking at brown calf-bindings, striking the book-cases, as though the papers must come forth to greet his search.

"Talking of the deer hunt to-morrow," he went on, "I remember a hunt when we had deer hounds here—oh, when you were a wee thing, Shelia, letting the deer out of the van. We met over near Rath, and Frank Brady was full of some new deer he'd got up from some place or other—Kerry, I think. There were two strangers out, on blood horses—come down for the first time, and very full of all they'd heard about us. So Brady wanted to have an extra fine hunt and everything quite O.K. He reckoned without that Kerry deer. When they uncartered him he stood quiet as you please, looking about him, and as for running anywhere, that wasn't in his mind. Then up he trots right close to us,

sniffing and snuffing, till we could see the two strangers—they were staying at the Cahers'—begin to snigger and mutter. 'Queer class of huntin',' says one—Lord Clan-Vaughan he was, the present Duke of Strood the second.

" 'Not much huntin',' said the other; and Brady, who was a rough kind of fellow, a little short in his temper, heard them.

" 'Bring up the hounds,' he said. 'We'll see to this deer.'

" Up they came, got the smell, and drove like thunderbolts across the field. When the Kerry deer heard them he knew it was time to move, but he was too fond of company; he ramped straight for the road, bounding into it, the hounds fifty yards behind, and jumped out just where the two men and Harty, on Blacksilks, a race mare, were standing.

" Scuttling he came, the dogs at his heels, and with that the three horses bolted in front of him down the road. You never heard such a hullabaloo in your life. There was the Kerry deer loping along, and those three blood horses bolting for their lives in front, and the pack roaring behind him, and every man-jack of us shouting behind them, and Frank Brady making up his mind whether he'd laugh or swear, and doing both at once.

" Every time they steadied the thoroughbreds, the pack behind them drove them mad again.

" We went for half a mile like that, until the Kerry deer met fat Mrs. Casey, walking home with a basket—and too frightened to run. He gave one eye at her, put down his head, caught her—well, just behind—and landed her nearly straight into a muddy ditch, where she screamed herself nearly mad. 'Twas a bit trying, y' know, when one was going quietly home with a loaf of bread. Then we came to cross-roads; the three



went right and left, and fortunately the deer went on. He took the fields afterwards and ran for a few miles, but we never saw those two from Caher Castle again that day. I wonder," he laughed, "if Quinlan's deer will give us as much fun?"

Over the rest of the evening, through childish games played to amuse Desmond—Blind Man's Buff, with notable members of the Hunt dodging each other wildly; Hunt the Slipper; Puss in the Corner—through dinner with its stereotyped Christmas fare; at Bridge afterwards, when Desmond and the white rabbit had gone to bed . . . the shadow of Pat fell upon them. Shelia would stop to sigh, the men looked suddenly gloomy and thoughtful. It was so much to lose; there were so many things the loss would take away.

Mac, too, was openly depressed, the thought of that "grand sort of box" rising between him and every attempt at gaiety. His little turquoise brooch would no doubt seem a very poor thing beside it. Was it gold—gem set—or silver, gorgeous hand-painted satin? When playing Blind Man, he shot out his fist and almost caught Donovan O'Grady's nose; he apologized, saying he was not thinking of the game. He was so absent that he spent his time blindfolded, and when later he called "Pat, Pat, Box in the Corner," they told him to go and smoke and play no more.

"You, that's always grandestist at games," said Desmond reproachfully.

So Christmas stole from them with a weep of mist, and morning brought the "wran boys," coming with all their piteous little trophies tied upon a bough, going warily to the back door to chant:

"The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,  
St. Stephen's day was cot in the furze,"

for they knew Norman would chase them swiftly if he caught sight of them and their slain.

A hoar-frost had come upon the fog in the morning, and the world lay a-glistening, beneath a bright sun. Every tree was feathery soft, with twigs white-coated ; the grass shone as a sheet of diamonds. As the sun grew stronger, a faint north wind rose coolly, shaking showers of fairy frost from twig and bough, while green streaks and corners came nosing across the diamond-sheeted fields. The crystallized crackling pools ran back to mud ; the north wind changed to the west, coming with a faint moan of rain.

Quinlan's deer hunt was not until twelve o'clock, so the thaw was well established before they started. Norman took out the Collier, Shelia rode the grey, and Mac risked his neck upon a sidling youngster whose heart was greater than his present skill as a hunter, the result, over narrow banks, proving disastrous. Aunt Jane and Uncle James, both suffering from Christmas indigestion, arranged to look on from the motor. They sat in it muffled in borrowed furs, pleasantly agreeing as to the shortcomings of the world, noting especially the household of Dunmore. Desmond had blankly refused to learn a Christmas collect ; Shelia, his mother, had not insisted upon it. Maria had been late with morning tea. Peter, whose patience was wearing thin, grew strangely deaf when Uncle James' bell rang ; he thought, in fact, " thim rats had been atin' the coord," and did not explain the careful manner in which he had muffled the clapper. Dunmore was still old-fashioned.

Uncle James regretted loftily that he had not brought a man of his own—it was mere kindness to Norman his not having done so.

" For a man of a certain age, my dear Miss Jane,"

cooed Mr. James Rivers, "and with a certain amount of money, requires his comforts."

Aunt Jane, not to be outdone, observed that directly the value of mines went up she would engage a maid. Maria had completely worn her out.

Bad cooking, bad housekeeping, inattentive servants ; they worried their bones of grievance as they sat drawn up at the meet, Carty, the chauffeur, straining his ears to hear what he could.

"The pair of ould devils," he said wrathfully, that evening. "An' the missus doin' all she can for the pair of them."

William Quinlan was a bank clerk with certain private means, which fostered an irrepressible love of sport. His childhood had been spent in a hunting-country, where he had come out first on the donkey, next on a gennet, finally on every horse he could bridle or saddle. When fate sent him to a remote town with no fox-hounds near him, and no time to go out with them if there had been, he set his wits to work—got together a couple of indefinitely bred hounds, bought two deer and started a local deer hunt.

The regrettable accident of an uncle who had risen to the post of manager had unwillingly driven William Quinlan into his present career, but hunt he must.

A few people who wanted to hunt cropped up. Saturday afternoons, and if the horses would move, Sunday mornings, were their fixtures, with occasionally early mornings stolen in autumn. He chose a ruined abbey as housing for his quarry, and, possessing no deer-cart, originated the idea of a huge sack, into which the unfortunate deer were driven through a small window, to be bundled, struggling, to the meet.

The curious part of it was that they ran, until the

fame of his chase got noised abroad, and from a collection of four his meets sometimes swelled to twenty.

This meet was one of invitation delivered by Meleady. Mr. William Quinlan beamed with pride, as the gathering at Tullytrack swelled.

The fox-hounds would not come out on a holiday; the meet next day was far off, so there were spare horses to hunt the deer on.

Quinlan, who had come on overnight, rode an active, crooked-shaped thoroughbred, with fired hocks, and a whistler to boot, but looking well and fit to go; a sour-eyed, shabby little thing, no fence was too big for her, no pace too fast. The pack, an assortment of setters, pointers, field spaniels and greyhounds, all strongly crossed with hounds, gathered about his horse's feet, leaping up at him when they were not quarrelling with each other, for they never met except on hunting-days. Mr. Quinlan had a system of walking them—which he found convenient. A red-faced, loose-limbed young fellow, he absolutely beamed upon his field.

"I'll show you sport, right enough," he said. "But last Saturday we ran fifteen mile, the last five of it in the black dark. Signs by, Doaty here tore a goat in mistake, and I was alone with meself, running on me feet when we took him. I have the same fellow to-day," he said, "an' we brought him over early so as to have him fresh—there he goes now."

When a wild chorus of huroos had sped the deer from his sack, he stood, snuffed up the fresh air, and trotted quietly away, looking about him, a black trail of delighted country people yelling close behind him.

"He doesn't look as if he'd take us far," said O'Grady. "Will he make for water?"

"Maybe he'd go farther than you'd like," grinned

Mr. William Quinlan. "And water—or air of mountain, you wouldn't know which that one 'd be at, there's that heart in him." He gathered his restrained pack together, trotting down the road. "Co-op, Lady! Co-op, Beauty, Spotty, Sweetheart! . . . Co-op here then! Here ye are! He wint through here, didn't he, boys?"

The boys shrieking response, they turned in at an open gate. Doaty, a pied hound with well-feathered legs, threw a deep-chested setter's note as they were loosed. Spotty, first cousin to a Dalmatian, yelped shrilly. Lady, a little, crooked-legged bitch, flung the long harrier yowl. Sweetheart, very long and thin, with a whip-tail, said nothing. With a chorus strongly resembling a band all playing different tunes, they flung themselves on the line, and it was clear that they possessed noses.

The deer, hearing them, changed his gait to a hopping canter. Sweetheart's long stride carried him far ahead as long as sight aided him, but it was Lady and Beauty, the former speedily outpaced, who swung in on doubtful ground and carried it forward; and there were others, more hound-like but slower, who hunted singly and in couples far behind, all trailing the line, so that no man could say he was not with hounds.

They fairly flew at first across rather holding land, fenced by broad, grass-grown banks. It was the edge of the Cahervally country, with the sullen Muldu crawling in its boglands to the east, and a great range of hills cutting across the sky in the west.

Norman, with a grin of joy, sent the Collier along, hearing the thunder of hoofs in his wake, as the field sat down to ride. Wild farmers whipped half-clipped horses past him at either side; a collection of riderless horses adorning the first fence. As buzzards to death, the crowd closed in upon the fallen.

"Bate him up, Mickey. Ye had a right to bate him at it. Here's Marty Dunne's grey, an' she like to be drrouned in the wather. Marty, lave wipin' yer face—hurry on—there's only the nose of her up sucking air. Be cripes, well over! That's the way!"—this to a successful horse. "There's Dunne's grey up to the shallows, an' begob she's off, peevish as a hooked throat! Run, Marty! . . . ye'll find her in the next trinch."

Black swarms gathered about refusers, shouting abuse at their humped-up quarters.

The pace, once Doaty was at fault, was not excessive; but they poured on steadily, losing the woollies and the crowd—now catching glimpses of the deer, now dropping far behind him, getting farther and farther from their own country and nearer the grim, towering line of mountain looming blackly at them.

Here, on some boglands, after a five-mile gallop, there was a long check. Even Lady's nose was at fault. Sweetheart gave it up as dull work and chased a passing hare. Quinlan, being wise, sent on scouts to ascertain where the deer had gone to.

Stragglers, a constant stream of belated hounds and horsemen, came up by degrees; blown horses and undaunted men, most of them dripping.

Meleady, suffering from the constant refusals of a new four-year-old—the colt's side marked by long weals, and Meleady's expression of heated sourness—arrived with Mac, who had shared the backward position, and, as the way of a man with a horse, was anxious to blame some one else for his several downfalls.

"It was that brute," he said to Norman—"that brute of Meleady's swerving and stopping everywhere, making this fellow so nervous that he flew everything."



Meleady first kicked his lumpy bay, and then patted its neck. "We were left," he said, "at the sthart; the courage was taken out of this one by three down in front of him, at the first bank. We niver saw a hound agin, an' sure, it takes a very ondipindant horse to go an unsighted hunt. He'll be a fine hunther yet—betther than that one of yours, Misther Mac, that treats the banks as ye'd shnap yer fingers."

Mac retorted "that it was better than treating them as if they were grazing-grounds, stopping to eat grass from each one." And both laughed.

Meleady's new youngster was a big, lumpy-shouldered, round-quartered bay; a long swish-tail pulled out and pointed to give it a semblance of breeding. It was the kind of horse with sufficient good points to take the eye of the judge who goes by the book. Few people but Meleady could have got it over three fences.

When news was brought back that the deer "was above frightening the childer in the Mulqueens' yard," and the pack immediately opened cry at the shouts, it was a lesson in determination to see the dealer take the young one in an iron grasp to send him at the first fence. No nice one—a broad, crumbling-edged ditch, before a narrow bank covered with coarse, long grass. Swish went the heavy tail, round came the whites of sulky eyes, but held straight with bit and knee, coaxed to the edge, then driven at with one last lash of stinging ashplant, the bay, remembering past beatings, got over. Mac's chestnut, flicking it lightly, landing with two feet to spare.

Now, as they chased the deer from Mulqueen's and took up the line again, the country grew more and more desolate, the bleak, dark crests of the mountain

range rose in front of them. The land sloped ever upwards, growing poorer.

"By all that's holy, he's over the hills, back away to the abbey!" gasped Quinlan, the master. "He'll cross by the speer an' drop down over Hannan's black bog, that we can't ride, an' if he doesn't get too tired, we'll find him in his own place looking for his feed."

The prospect of that hill-range tightened many bridles. To climb and scramble up the steep sides and pursue the chase by Hannan's black bog was not alluring.

It was just before this that Norman bought a horse. About two miles from the check they came rather slowly down to a road where a man was struggling with a terrified grey horse drawing a cart of turnips, the passing of Doaty, Sweetheart, and the rest having driven it mad.

Before they could get to the driver's aid, the grey charged the low wall in front of it, sweeping the cart across the ruins and falling himself outside, where he lay buried amid a mound of round, pale brown roots.

Norman and Meleady jumped off, running to the rescue, lest William Quinlan should receive a long bill of damages. They undid the harness, slipped back the cart, and got the horse to his feet.

"Pull him here till we retackle him. Hurry now!" stormed Meleady, eyeing the vanishing chase.

The carter, a red-cheeked youth, looked at it too. "Isn't it great!" he said, ignoring Meleady's furious impatience. "An' he able to lep. Begonnes, an' he so anxious for it, let him have his way," cried the boy.

With a crash the heavy hames and collar rattled to the ground; the back strap and crupper followed suit, then, gathering up the long rope reins, the boy jumped up, hurrying the ambitious grey on at a rattling pace.

It was a long-legged, well-bred four-year-old, with undeniable shoulders and back and quarters.

When Norman, coming behind on the Collier, had seen the grey rocket across two banks and face a third—a horrible overgrown place—undeterred, he took advantage of a check to discuss the matter.

“He’s by Petrol, that broke down young, an’ his dam won a farmers’ race,” said the red-faced youth delightedly. “He was always a rovin’ schamer that none could keep in his own field; sure, when he saw the dogs to-day he was near to kill himself with the dirth of delight. An’ I’ll take thirty pound for him.”

Meleady acted as vet during the check; the bargain was concluded, and the grey, promptly christened Record Breaker, despatched straight to Dunmore; its load of turnips being comfortably eaten up by a flock of sheep.

The arrival at the base of the hills checked the rest of the Cahervally contingent. They looked up the bleak, forbidding sides, with Doaty, Lady, Beauty, and the rest already scrambling yowling through the heather, and they adopted discretion. Quinlan’s black mare, going easily as if they had just started, was ridden straight at the ascent, followed by a few people from his own country; the others abandoned mountaineering.

“Ten mile an’ more to go yet,” chanted William Quinlan back to them. “I tell you ’twill be a hunt!” He was off next minute, running by his mare’s side, absolutely delighted with the sport he had shown the fox-hunters.

Two motors panted on the lonely road skirting the mountain, one containing Aunt Jane and Uncle James, both rather hurt because they had been obliged to

come so far to fetch their nephew and niece ; the other Miss Slade, who had arrived late, and now looked about her anxiously, with a smile of greeting ready upon her pretty mouth.

It dawned, then paled frostily before the ardent address of Mr. Pat Maguire, as he ambled up a by-road on a singularly fresh horse ; farther back, some one leading a chestnut seemed more what she sought.

Pat bent over her gallantly, wishing her the compliments of the season, regretting she had not been out to ride the deer hunt, then asking tenderly if she'd got his box of sweeties ; all this just as Mac came near enough to see, but not near enough to hear Miss Slade thank Pat glacially, assuring him that he was exceedingly kind, but it was unfortunate that she never ate sweets.

She wheeled upon muddy, weary Mac with a shy glance of welcome which ought to have made this day happy, if he had seen it. Unfortunately, Mac's blue eyes were fixed upon the florid comeliness and bending familiarity of Pat Maguire, so that his own grunt of greeting was dully cold as the evening. He tramped by slowly, hoping over his shoulder that Miss Slade had enjoyed her Christmas boxes.

"But you'll use the pretty case," said Pat, looking comfortably at the slow passing of Mac, who, with man's delight in self-torture, pulled up to settle his girths within hearing. "For keeping ribbons an' fal-lals in?" went on Pat. "I told them to choose the best sort of a box they had and to charge for it as they liked."

"Oh, the box?"—Miss Slade's voice grew curiously high—"I'm afraid my maid took that—she rather admired it."

Mac pulled the chestnut round.

"Would you give me a drink?" he said softly. "I've had a bad ride and I'm very tired." He edged insistently between Pat and the motor.

"The young one's dead beat," added Mac.

"If . . . Shelia could get it led back, I'd drive you to Dunmore," said Miss Slade, her voice recovering its normal tones.

Shelia could . . . the boy was clever enough to lead three.

"And you'd think I hadn't paid a good-looking guinea for those sweets," muttered Mr. Maguire very indignantly, as five minutes later he watched a motor, holding three, vanish into the dusk.

"That . . . abominable box of sweets. . . . He boasted of them yesterday. Said they were in a gold case or something," said Mac in a questioning tone as he was driven away. With curious thought Nancy had brought a spare coat out.

"They were really quite nice. I liked the coffee creams immensely," said Nancy demurely, recalling the grunting good evening Mac had honoured her with.

"And the box, of course, was——"

"Well?" growled Mac.

"Brilliant. All pink and blue and crimson, tied with yellow."

Macnamara looked at the dull evening. He thought suddenly that it was cold, and if Nancy did not mind, he would ride when they passed the horses.

"But . . . Marie took the thing," went on Miss Slade softly, "that was true, Also it really was . . . appalling; the poor children had the chocolates." Her fingers, altering the position of the rug, touched Mac's—then going to the fur at her neck, displaced them to show a turquoise brooch.

The motor slipped on through the dimness, with its whimper of coming rain; the weary little chestnut carried no burden back to Dunmore.

## CHAPTER XIII

## NANCY HAS AN IDEA

"Not for mortal toiling nor spinning  
Will the matters of mortals mend."—*Gordon.*

"HORSES!" said Mr. Slade contemptuously. "A horse! My dear Nancy, you must know that money is not made from racers and hunters, that they are always liable to fail. I fear if your friend, Mr. Macnamara, relies on this colt of his to patch up his fallen and most dilapidated fortunes, that his roof will remain unmended, his house fall to greater ruin."

Nancy Slade wrinkled her pretty nose thoughtfully. "Of course, the horse may not win his race," she said.

"Even if he does, Macnamara will be the richer for a very few hundred pounds, and there is an end of it. I wonder, by the way, what firm he employed who worked with brass buckets upon his roof. I never heard of the name."

"No," said Miss Slade faintly, "they were—quite a new firm, I think."

"From their methods of procedure I should not say they gained much employment," observed her father, "as slaters."

"I should not think they would," observed his daughter, choking over an imaginary crumb. "As murderers—now——"

"Eh?" said Mr. Slade.



"They did skim slates very close to our heads," murmured Nancy.

She was silent for a little, thinking of the big, dreary house, with its peeling plaster, broken-hinged doors and barren, neglected grounds. Thinking, too, of the huge rooms, full of valuable old furniture, and what they would look like if a certain young lady, with unlimited credit, took their papering and painting and re-ordering into her hands. What was the use of money and youth if one could not be used to make the other happy? Her face grew wistful.

Her father looked at her keenly.

"It's not that I dislike him, child," he said. "But you know there is no use in pouring money into broken sieves. If I felt it would really be of use to set you up there—money would not stop me. As it is, when this horse has run his race—I feel I must wait for that—I shall take you abroad for a year. We'll travel and forget things here."

Miss Slade hummed a little tune to the accompaniment of her fingers upon the table.

"Where you'll no doubt meet other people—learn how foolish it would have been to throw yourself away." Her father thought she was taking it very quietly. "By the way, I met Maguire yesterday, coming to call here. What a pity that is. I wonder if it is wise to be kind to him. He is so very much cook and so little Maguire."

With an irritating persistence which strained her parent's nerves, Miss Slade played "Has sorrow thy young days shaded"—with much correctness of time and hard tap of fingers on polished wood. Observing her father stare in displeasure, a gleam came to her eyes, and she changed to "The March of the Men of

Harlech" with crisp suddenness. The gleam grew brighter, until it brought a smile to her lips. "Abroad," she said, half in time to the stirring march, "unless I marry, father."

"Marry?" You won't take any one. Marry whom?" queried her startled and irritated parent.

"Oh, one never knows," murmured Miss Slade, changing her wooden time to a dreamy rendering of "Love's Young Dream."

"I certainly cannot imagine. You wouldn't do Mac any good by marriage without my consent," said Mr. Slade sharply.

"There's nothing half so sweet in life—I wasn't thinking of Mac," said Nancy, coming across and kissing him. "There are two doors to every house, dear father—a back and a front."

"I wonder what on earth she means?" said Mr. Slade, as she left the room. "No one ever knows what a woman thinks of. Sometimes I don't believe they know themselves."

He went down to his office in a thoughtful humour.

Nancy, cogitating on back and front doors, put on her best dress and went out walking.

There was no law to prevent Murrough Macnamara having business in the town of Cahervally, even if it only consisted in asking the grocer what on earth he wanted to be paid for—and no reason why Miss Slade, going to the saddler's to see about some repairs to her saddle, should not meet him there. But just as she walked past one of the large shops with their strange assortment of last year's garments in the windows, she saw Pat Maguire coming, with the happy swagger, from the steps of the club.

The hue of his gaiters and boots was that of virgin

gold, his tie was blue, and he had known he was good to look on as, walking up and down the dingy streets, he had met Miss Kattie Hassett, a buxom maiden, who had once hoped to blush by his side at the altar rails.

The expression in her eyes was one of mingled admiration and regret.

"My! but you're looking grand, Pat!" she said sorrowfully. "Too grand to know old friends, I suppose?"

Miss Hassett, in her radiant pink, with a collection of feathers on her head and about her throat, and hair which still smelt of hot iron, was very handsome. Her giggling adoration was a change from Miss Slade's polite attention; so much so that Pat, having talked for five minutes of his own importance, asked her to tea with him at the local Rumpelmayer's.

He could spare her half an hour, though Mr. O'Grady wanted him to see about a horse, and he was due up to look at the colour of his new car, and Sir Ralph had half asked him to take a drink; but he was none of your pass-you-bys—so he squeezed Kattie's plump arm and cast a halo over her afternoon, ere he returned to the club.

As the damsel flew down to buy a new pair of gloves for the occasion, Pat returned to the club, the right of entry being still a joy to him, and as he came out again saw Miss Slade and Miss Slade saw her father passing, going into a shop. The gleam in Nancy's eye returned as she saw him. So far she had endured his attentions badly—now she actually smiled upon him and waited to talk.

Pat glanced at his garbled reflection in Muldea's window; he patted his tie and pulled his moustache, and Miss Hassett faded from his mind.

Having politely remarked that it was a fine day, Nancy asked him about his horses, told him she admired his black, and, with her pretty head on one side, was almost coquettish beneath the chill eyes of her watching father.

They stood before a sweet-shop. Pat, dazzled and emboldened, suddenly plunged in, to return with various marzipan fruits in a paper bag, and to assure Miss Slade that the peaches were pink as her cheeks.

"Though I'm told they run a bit of starch through them, they're real sweet to eat," said Pat, proffering the bag, softly.

At this moment, seeing a slight figure's thunderous attitude before the saddler's door, she became suddenly aloof and hastened on.

For a usually somewhat independent young woman, she was almost meek as she chose straps which she did not want, with a close adherence to Mac's advice about them all.

Then the evening was closing in, chill winds from the Caher swept the grey streets, and Miss Slade observed that she was thirsty.

Mac, who was steeped in gloom, answered that it was time for tea—he was just going to get some.

"They won't expect me at home. I shall be late too," said Nancy.

Mac dropped a stirrup-iron with a ringing clang.

"You're not going to take some with that creature Maguire then," he said.

"Well—not to-day," said Miss Slade. "No one seems to want to give me tea to-day."

Mac said nothing, but the determined manner in which he walked towards the confectioner's seemed his idea of speech. Before they got there he took the paper

bag, peered into it, and bestowed it upon a passing beggar-child.

"Mr. Maguire sent you those," said Mac easily to the child.

Nancy, following him into the small shop, winked at nothing, smiled to herself, sighed, and then composed her pretty face to gentle vacancy.

She began to see certain difficulties in the path she had chosen.

The élite of Cahervally strays upstairs to take its tea, into a long, dingy room, ill warmed by a struggling fire, and dim as to lights.

As they walked up the narrow staircase, rather quietly, for Mac appeared to think his companion might stumble, so held her hand to guide her, shrill squawks and giggles trickled from the doorway.

"Give over now!" came shrilly. "I declare to heavens me hair'll be destroyed on me. An' I near to choke that time."

A masculine bass boomed something which could not be distinguished; a clatter of cups signified a scuffle.

Pat Maguire had kept his appointment with Miss Hassett, and, being in an excellent humour, behaved to the lady as a young man is expected to when the tea-room happens to be empty.

He squeezed her waist, oblivious of the open windows and the houses opposite, pulled her hair, and made merry according to his kind.

As Miss Slade and Mac came quietly through the dim doorway, Pat was holding the lady by the back of the neck with one hand, while with the other he fed her with a besugared sponge cake.

"Shall we sit here?" said Mac distinctly.

"Mother of God!" cried Miss Hassett in agitated

staccato, adding lower-voiced riders to the effect that she was entirely disgraced. Pat, with the air of a naughty child, glared awkwardly at the arrivals, his zest in entertaining quite gone. He wished Miss Hassett at the bottom of the Caher rather than by his side.

"Seeing that"—Mac had taken a table as far away as possible from the others—"I don't know how you can——"

Miss Slade eyed the florid Pat critically.

"Can what?" she inquired sweetly.

"Talk to him—take paper sweets from him," said Mac, with muffled irritation.

"He's Shelia's cousin," said Nancy. "Also they were sugar. One can't be actually rude to him," and the gleam in her eyes was very marked. "It . . . oh, one never knows," said Miss Slade, pouring out inferior tea hurriedly, with the air of one who checks a confidence.

Now the two near the window could talk unheard, but Miss Hassett's voice was one which could only sink to rustling whisper and even then echoed through a room.

A look at the dull glass reassuring her as to her appearance, she set herself to charm Pat back to his former gaiety. There was always the table cloth to hide their hands. With the folly of the inexperienced she chose reminiscence to aid her, her overloud voice reminding him of various tender episodes in the past.

Across Mac's and Nancy's low-toned conversation there drifted, generally in grating whispers, "D'ye remember Dayly's dance, Pat, an' how old Father James had at us for hidin' behind the curtain? Indeed, it took me ten minutes with Hannie's tongs before ye could look at me fringe."



An uneasy grunt from Pat, followed by a glance towards Nancy, betrayed his desire not to remember.

"I tell ye they can't hear. An', Pat, the spring evenin' we went pickin' primroses in the old forth, an' I was frightened of the fairies. Timsy nearly brought mamma on me when I tried to slip in. I declare she'd have whipt the face off me. Oh, very well, then, I won't. An' did you hear that Polly Clune has a match made up with old Doyle, an' she dyin' all the time for James Ryan? But he could put no money down, so she bought a blue dress to be married in at Mulqueen's to-day."

"And how's Forefront?" Nancy stopped listening to this flood of reminiscence.

"He gets harder and goes faster every day. I've had too bad a time since I wanted a good one to do much hoping, but I do think that horse is a wonder. We may see him win a National yet," said Mac wistfully. "He's over at Norman's now, since they set bailiffs on me." The "they" was followed by a dark glance at Pat. "I look at the fellow and think of Shelia and all she must lose."

"Poor Shelia," said Nancy.

"And"—Mac's voice grew even lower—"I don't believe they will gain anything by their precious uncle and aunt. The old man is too sugary to be genuine," said Mac sharply. "A will in one's favour is very excellent, provided there is anything to will."

They sat for a little looking down at the quiet street, at the entrancing vision of a butcher's shop just opposite, and then Nancy rose to leave. A lean, well-bred jarvey horse took her home at a lively gallop. Throughout dinner she preserved the same smile, the lengthening of lip which is not born of merriment, but tells of some

hidden intent. She met her father's irate eye with a sweet and ingenuous transparency.

"May I ask," he burst out after dinner, "why you spent half an hour opposite the club talking to Pat Maguire, and why you sent him to do your shopping?"

"Oh, you were there. He was only giving me some sweets," said Miss Slade softly, feeding her dog—"nice peachy, starchy walnuts and things."

Mac went early to Dunmore next day, to find the household agitated by one of the many quarrels between Miss Jane and Maria.

The worthy maid had been ten minutes late, had in her agitation presented Miss Jane with a wrong tablet—a mistake resulting in temper-shortening consequences to Aunt Jane; bitter recriminations, rousing Maria to the now usual procedure of telling Shelia that the one was waiting to be born that 'd sthay in the house with Miss Brown, and melting later to a sulky apology as she remembered the postman.

Shelia sat in her own sitting-room, slightly shaken by the tempest, thinking with sorrow of other quiet years, when no uncles and aunts had disturbed their peace. It was hard to endure a perpetual light blister, applied hourly. Constant cavillings at her house-keeping, her lack of method, her criminal negligence of Desmond's religious education. Miss Jane's bitter little tongue spared no one. She came to something approaching open war with Norman, who was not patient. Uncle James, on the contrary, teased them with constant sweetness, a cloying power of getting his own way.

Old port and claret were necessary to the preservation of his health. Champagne was constantly required to soothe his nerves. Peter's once happy temper

soured beneath a flow of urbane criticism and suspicion : a decanter held to the light to see if its contents had been tampered with ; a gentle suggestion that the old brandy looked cloudy. Peter, who was the soul of honesty, was almost moved to uncivil retort.

" Mac "—Shelia welcomed Mac's quiet coming—" Mac, I feel almost worn out at times. Nebulous fortunes may be excellent things, but a little present comfort would suit me better. Oh, Mac, why did grandfather die without writing a little more ? "

Mac thought that grandfather could not have told them ; it was not as a rule a matter of taste.

" So far as nebulous fortunes go," he added slowly. " I—wonder—Shelia, have you ever discovered where Uncle James' money is invested ? "

" No," said Shelia.

" It seems a matter of much mystery. I should like to know." Mac stroked his upper lip. " He has a very good time here, whatever the future may bring forth."

They were both silent for a time, Shelia, brooding on her ever-present trouble, looking out of the window drearily towards Clonmony, where Pat Maguire waited for the inheritance he had never been intended to get. Her shrewd brain too was not devoid of suspicion concerning Uncle James. Too much promise had made her sceptical.

The embittered entrance of Aunt Jane, very frosty as to her nose, checked further surmise. She lost no time in opening the attack upon Maria.

" Careless, inattentive, almost impertinent," growled Miss Jane. " To present me with a liver tabloid when it was time for me checking my tendency to rheumatism might have made me seriously ill. I assure you"—

she turned to Mac—"I have only half an hour at present for religious meditation."

Mac suggested callously that one could always breakfast an hour later, and then asked her silkily how long she had taken that morning.

Miss Jane's snap of "None" was almost tiger-like in its ferocity. "For myself," Shelia's aunt thawed by the glowing fire, "I would not have an Irish servant in the house. I never pass the kitchen window that they are not brewing tea; they seem to eat at all hours. There are little heaps of dust in many places; but of course, dear Shelia is used to extravagance. Later on, perhaps," said Miss Jane spitefully, "you may, my dear niece, wish you had studied economy."

Shelia's smooth cheeks flushed pinkly.

Maria, looking worn, arrived with Miss Jane's morning glass of Burgundy, and Uncle James came smoothly into the room. Having bade Mac a sweetly frozen good morning, his sugary voice told its tale of displeasure.

Far be it from him to suspect, but he did think Peter tampered with the port. As Norman insisted on the boy having a key, he could not prevent it. Uncle James' hands wove webs of suspicion.

"I certainly," he said, "missed two glasses this morning from the decanter."

Shelia's cheeks grew pinker. She rang the bell, summoning Peter, which was the last thing Uncle James wished her to do. His own fat little face grew rosy at her first direct words.

"Peter, Mr. Rivers says two glasses of port disappeared last night. Can you account for it?"

"I can so, ma'am," said Peter. "Misther Rivers wint back and had some more, an' ye all gone to bed."

"Certainly not," began Uncle James, but Peter stopped him. "Mickey was in with meself in the panthry," he said, "we givin' a lick to the table silver, whin we saw Misther Rivers comin' down the passage the key in his hand."

"It had quite escaped my memory. I do remember I felt unwell," said Uncle James, his sweet voice less round than usual.

Peter took up Miss Jane's Burgundy glass cheerfully. "That's the way of it, ma'am," he remarked to Shelia, and went out.

They were hunting next day, hounds meeting at the base of the heathery hills near Dullen, close to the lands of the man Donovan O'Grady had spoken of when he prophesied trouble. Paddy Maher owned a tiny strip of land, sandwiched between Shelia's. He was a sour-visaged, disaffected man, full of preaching of his country's wrongs, and trying to persuade every one that the Irish were a down-trodden race. It was most unfortunate that on each occasion of their hunting down the hill, a few people had skirted across the corner of Maher's narrow field, bringing him full of complaints to Norman next day.

He threatened action for trespass, he stormed against the tyranny of what he called the Hunt Club, and had finally become so bitter in his upbraidings that Norman warned every one he could think of not to ride over the man's land.

"I'll sphoil yere sphort for ye next time," stormed Maher. "I tell ye I will. Faix, I'll just sit undher me own wall, an' head yere fox back—away from me own schrap of grass, anyhow."

Mickey having been sent out to make inquiries, Norman heard that there was little doubt of Maher

keeping his word, so rode to the meet with a rueful mind.

It was a grey day, a soft wind blowing from the west, and every prospect of a screaming scent. There were strangers out from another country; it would be cruel luck if Maher headed their fox back when he was going down to the valley.

Norman rode uneasily to the first covert, so absently that his black horse almost plunged him beneath him, finding its bridle quite loose.

Norman recovered his seat with a red face, using bitter words concerning overfed racehorses.

"I'm giving the brute twenty pounds of corn a day," he said, "and that's how he rewards me. I've told Harman the horse is fast enough to do what he wants, but no, he won't give me the money unless he wins this wretched race; so I must go on stuffing him and nearly get my back broken."

They drew the verge of the hill first, a scrap of gorse which seldom failed to hold, and ran from that along the heather, and later down the green slopes of the valley.

No horse went better across the rough ground than the black thoroughbred, or more temperately when they reached the swelling slopes below and ran across high, narrow banks.

Norman's mind was at first taken up by the fear of Maher's wrath if any one crossed his strip of ground, and later by meeting one of the strangers, an Englishman, who wanted a horse, and was prepared to buy, late as it was in the season.

Norman's second mount, named Topsy Turvy, after the Honourable Crasher's mare in "Market Harboro'," was one of those animals which are better sold than kept. A shifty, lurching goer, with a nasty fashion of throwing



her head about when she was steadied for a trappy place, she would perhaps make an excellent hunter in a fly country, where her delight in pace could be indulged.

Norman described her with tempting words, and knew if they took the usual line past Maher's strip of ground and across the valley to Lismore, that nothing would go more brilliantly over the big, easy country. Given scent enough to keep her galloping, Topsy Turvy was the pleasantest of mounts.

On the other hand, if Maher chose to keep his vow and head them back into the hills, she would rush and stumble over the heather, getting her restless head up at every small, rotten fence, where one must steady or fall.

Hill Granger wanted to try her himself, so there would be no disguising the faults which would not matter in an English fly country.

It grew colder as the day wore on ; the wind backed to the north, blowing hard, chilling men and horses. The rawness of coming rain was in the air. They shivered, jogging to Croagh gorse, welcoming each sheltering tree or fence.

There are so many varieties in cold weather. The grey cold of November, with its first touch of winter ; the dark coldness of December and January, when the earth sleeps and the sun has no power, and bitter rain or hail and snow numb hands upon the reins ; the clear cold of March, when all the world seems fresh washed, and an icy wind raves across a sky of white-flecked blue ; the treacherous cold of spring leaping out at us from lurking corners ; the wet cold of summer, coming untimely, chilling us when we should languish in the season's heat. To-day it seemed January again as the heavy purple clouds massed,

creeping darkly across the sky. The very clouds themselves looked naked and perished, as if they had forgotten to put on their coats.

As they came near the gorse Sir Ralph drew back to speak to Norman.

"I've warned every one I could find," he said earnestly, "and I hope you've done the same. The fellow's a perfect firebrand. He's causing a lot of mischief here. We always run past that corner by Craig's, so just get on ahead then, and shout."

Norman promised dolefully, for he knew the rush of an eager field. Maher's ground was the clearer riding, the corner they galloped over a very tempting little short cut.

Hill Granger gave his hireling—a useful, rather weedy brown—to Norman, and got on to Topsy Turvy himself. The mare was chilled from a long wait, her lean head was high even upon the road, and Norman saw unhappily that it would take at least three fences, taken at racing speed, to soothe her touchy temper. Hill Granger professed himself delighted with her; she looked like winning a point-to-point, and he said he liked them a little hot.

"But safe," said the stranger.

Norman sighed, wondering which bank Topsy Turvy would fly. Uncle James, on the pig-eyed grey, had come on with the second horses; his sugary temper seemed to have been boiled to cracking point, while his little mind was centred on the hope of getting Peter, who had betrayed him, into mischief.

The only thing he could think of to-day was to surreptitiously pour out half the strong ginger cordial in his flask, and mix the remainder with water—a net which seemed to entangle the weaver when the afternoon

became bitterly cold, and he wanted warming comfort greatly.

Norman, hearing the complaint, tasted the cordial ; then, remarking that the bottle must have gone bad, emptied the attenuated drink upon the heather, telling Uncle James he was better without it.

" I finished my own long ago," observed Norman equably.

Now, James Maher, brooding bitterly, had spent the morning watching for the hounds. A survey of month-old hoof marks had helped to cherish his well-nursed wrath, making him vow that at least he would spoil one good run for the hunters, or, failing this, he believed that by lying in this particular spot he was sure to turn the fox down a new grassfield belonging to Shelia, across which some reckless spirits were sure to gallop. He crouched low behind the fence between his land and the Maguires'. A kind of natural track lay along the hillside, and along this the fox, making his point, was wont to steal, passing Maher's land before he turned to the valley below. So far he had always beaten hounds. A common line for all hill foxes. One in particular always went that way.

The north wind chilled Maher to the bone ; he could not hide upon the sheltered side, but he crouched on, undisturbed by various wails of " Da " from his children ; going dinnerless lest the fox might come when he was away.

Of course, fate ordained that it was quite late when the yow-ow-ow above him told that hounds had found and were coming his way. A bleak and purple visage pushed itself above a tangle of brambles, baleful eyes fixed upon the hillside. Yow-ow—there was a screaming scent across the heather ; he could see horses

now, topping the hill ; the occasional white flash of a hound.

Something stirred nearer him ; a blackbird flew startled from a stunted thorn. Some grazing calves wheeled and scattered, then, loping along the natural track, came a stout dog-fox, going less easily than his wont, for hounds were fairly close to him.

"Go back, ye schamer !" With a yell, hat in hand, Maher flung himself into battle. His war-dance in front of the astounded fox would have done credit to a savage. "Go back, ye vilyin, an' sphoil their hunt, or into the new grass with ye," cried Maher fiercely.

The fox appeared to obey ; he stood still, glared at Maher, and swung swiftly, diving into a tangle of thorns.

Maher rubbed his frozen face happily. Staring up the hill, he believed he saw the heather quiver as the fox fled back to cover.

But hounds were behind. Dirk covert and probably safety lay in front. The small red beast leapt into the thorns, crept from that to the hedge, and, instead of keeping along the hill, ran down the fence of Maher's field, out through his potato garden, past his hayricks, and then took his old line to Dirk.

With sudden joy Maher watched the pied wave dashing down the hill, mellow-throated, wistful-eyed as forgotten lovers, murderous as Thugs, as they ran hot for blood.

Norman saw the dancing figure and ground his teeth. Believing they were certain to run back, he eased the hireling, instead of keeping in front as he had intended to, to warn people off Maher's land.

"The skunk has kept his word," he said disgustedly.

"There—he's right back." For a distant shout from cover came to them.

"I have done it. He's over the new grass." But then Maher sat down suddenly, stricken to stone. Looking back to his own land, he saw the small red streak now boldly crossing into his garden. Breath and speech left him; he merely sat transfixed, watching hounds upon the heather.

They dwelt where their fox had turned; spread out at fault, then, with a positive crash of tongue, were away again. The fox had run down the fence; the mystery of scent determined that hounds should own to the line down the centre of the narrow field, fleeting as a flock of pigeons across the green. A low wall led into it, the gate to the house and another small fence marked the way out, and the field, led by Topsy Turvy in a savage humour, wheeled hard upon the flying pack. Fifty horses ploughed the soft grass with two hundred iron-shod hoofs; half that number kicked a few stones from the loosely built wall. As the last woolly three-year-old was whipped over a flat cairn of stones and driven onwards in lumbering pursuit, the narrow field looked as if stricken with the small-pox; an infectious patient between healthy greenlands.

"We've done it now," said Norman, dashing the hireling across a high, narrow bank to cut off the hounds.

Worse, thrusting men dashed into the potato garden. clattered hot-hoofed in among the ricks of hay. Martin Halford, the heavy-weight from the neighbouring hunt, landed upon the pigsty, shattering the rotten boards, sending a healthy family of porkers squealing wildly, loose upon the world. Maher's colt, a leggy chestnut came whinnying out to join the chase; the goat butted



his wife in its flurried escape from the hounds' mouths ; and the farm boy, going completely mad, reft the old grey mare from her shed, flung himself upon her back, and beat her as far as she could go in the hunt.

Maher returned slowly, a curious expression in his eyes.

They ran hard to Dirk, pushed him through, swung left-handed in the valley, and were beaten by an un-stopped drain below the hill.

Norman, riding home upon Topsy Turvy, who had gone magnificently and was now sold, whistled cheerily. Yet, as they passed below Maher's house, he looked unhappily at the scarred strip of land.

"No bush harrowing wanted there this year," he said ruefully to Shelia. He stroked his chin, thinking of the morrow and the thunder of Maher's wrath.

The future notice boards, the barbed wire, the possible poisoning of the land, and the stirring to anger of other people by Maher's vicious tongue.

He thought he would find the man at Dunmore waiting for him ; but the evening passed with nothing worse than Uncle James' complaints of his ginger cordial. The morning, a bitterly raw one, brought no message to say, "Maher was outside waitin' on him."

Norman grew uneasy. Silent mischief was harder to combat with than a flow of words ; he could not think what the man was doing. So, acting on Shelia's advice, he walked up to confer, and, if possible, soothe the small farmer's wrath.

As he came to the narrow road by the hill he met Maher himself, a large comforter wound about his neck, leading a lame grey cart-mare.

"I'm afraid"—Norman looked up—"I'm afraid we did you a little harm on Wednesday, Maher."

Maher rubbed a stubbly chin ; his shave was a



weekly event. He looked at his scarred field, his broken fences ; he coughed harshly, but a twinkle of unmistakable humour lit his eyes.

"Ye did that same, yer honour, ye did ; not two or three, but the whole crowd of ye, savin', maybe, yerself. The land's ready ploughed for me . . . but . . . I tell ye . . . there's judgment in that same. Didn't I lay up undther the fince for three hour . . . signs bye, I can't breathe with the cowld I tuk . . . with me hat in me hand ready to turn the hunt back or down yer own new grass-field next to mine ? An' he came creepin' at last gentle an' aisy along the thrack. Then up with me lettin' a yell, thinkin' he mus' go back or down the new grass. But he stud still, threw a eye on me like a Christian, and 'twas like as if he raysoned it out. 'Ye sthopped me,' says he, 'ov me own way that harrumed none,' and with neither 'with your leave' or 'by it' he futed it down me own field, straight pasht the house, where niver a fox ran before. If I but left him he'd have gone on an' down the five acres an' past Muldoon's, where he always wint. There's the ould mare lame, and the colt with a skhelp off his leg, an' the missus hurted—savin' yer honour's presence—in the sthombach, an'—meself."

The twinkle in Maher's eyes brightened ; he burst into sudden croaking laughter at his own discomfiture. His Irish sense of humour had proved too much for him.

"The sorra I fear I'll cross yere fox agin," croked Maher hoarsely. "Let ye hunt away, an' welcome."

"Well . . . I'm . . . blest !" said Norman, hurrying home to tell his wife.

## CHAPTER XIV

## HOW MAC FELL INTO TROUBLE

"Though tales false gossips tell  
In spite or heedlessness."—*Gordon*.

"NORMAN!" Mac looked up from perusing the *Irish Times*. "Norman, have you ever felt it would be a blessing to have your head cut off, because then your bad tooth would never ache again?"

"I . . . have not," said Norman drily.

"I do just now. Everything's going wrong with me. I shall lose the nine acres and the Long Hill, my two best bits, because I can't pay up. Every horse I own in the world is wrong, and it's two months to Forefront's race. Another year I'd have come to you. Now you're a fellow-traveller on Mount Misfortune."

Norman sighed drearily. "If the Collier had won *his* race, I'd give you the £400," he said. "As it is I'm afraid of our friend next door. Mickey tells me they have a new mare that he dislikes. She came from Dublin way, and he brought her to a meet last week. A little cock-tailed, hogged thing, almost a pony, but Mickey shakes his head over her." He paused. "Borrow from Uncle James," he suggested. "I'll tell him to give me his cheque now, and you shall have it."

They were sitting in the library at Dunmore a few days after Christmas. Darkness had sent them home early, from a disappointing day of short scurries and failing scent, with bitter hail showers lashing them.

Uncle James, fresh and cherubic, having hauled the pig-eyed grey about for an hour in the morning, came smiling to his tea. And lost all appetite as Mac placidly informed him of their conversation.

"If you could, Uncle James," said Norman, "let me have that present now, and I'll lend it to Mac; he wants it."

Uncle James' complexion flushed from pink to crimson, and back to purplish white ere he gathered breath to reply. Then his sugary voice was firm and collected. He was sorry . . . but he had just invested all his ready money in a fresh speculation . . . and . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . would pay until the spring. His plump little hands waved airily.

Mac's shrewd blue eyes watched him quietly as he spoke. "Well, Norman," Mac stirred the big fire slowly. "You shall lend it all to me in the spring. I won't rob you . . . I think——"

"Mr. Macnamara!" snapped Uncle James.

Mac's face was void of all expression, yet something in it made Mr. James Rivers turn scarlet again, breathe heavily through his nose, and register a deeper note of dislike than before against the slight young man lounging opposite him.

He retreated to Stephen for a glass of port before his nerves calmed down.

"Norman!" Mac took some more toast. "You may *give* me all that promised cheque, if you like."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Norman sharply.

"You'll see," said Mac, quietly going off to write to Miss Slade.

It was merely to inquire if she meant to be at the Fitzgeralds' tea-party, but he had to go to his own room to compose the question, and it apparently took four closely written pages to express it.

Uncle James, fortified by Shelia's old port, came back to eat his tea

Shelia was surrounded by visitors in the drawing-room.

As the old gentleman ate large rounds of buttered toast, his loving consideration for Norman grew almost pathetic. He produced a long envelope from his pocket showing a will leaving all he possessed to his dear nephew, and Norman, overwhelmed, omitted to notice that nothing was specified. He talked with tearful note of the parting in the spring, and of little speculations which he hoped would make it possible for him to endow the household at Dunmore with a golden summer. More softly still, he spoke of the many springs and summers before the young, the very few which he, an old buffer, could hope for. Lost in a maze of things which he could not understand, caught up in spinning webs of unknown stocks and shares, touched by his uncle's pathos, Norman coughed softly and ordered champagne for dinner on the strength of his inheritance, and Mac, drinking it, smiled wisely. He filled Miss Jane's glass with barley-water almost tenderly, sympathizing with her as she reproved Maria for several things. He suggested gravely that Peter should attend her with early tea; not being his work, he was sure to do it nicely.

Shelia, fair and unruffled after her long day out, asked suddenly if any one had noticed a roan horse which Pat Maguire had ridden that day. "I liked him so much," she said. "He's just my stamp. Now that the grey's gone again I should buy him—if I had enough money—but I haven't."

This, from the heiress of Dunmore! Norman felt his cheeks flush almost painfully. Shelia, his wife, lacking a horse she wanted. Her birthday fell in January, and he registered a vow to try to get the horse for her, if nothing was wrong with it. This was a case in which Uncle James might—nay, must be useful.

Mac went to his tea-party, and found Nancy occupied, and trailed himself to a corner to smoke. The corner was a sofa in the smoking-room, and it was already occupied by Mr. Slade, who welcomed him with a start. It appeared that Mac was the very man he wanted to see. An opulent friend in England, who used motors for speed and horses for pleasure, wanted a pair of horses. Could Mac help him? He himself knew nothing. They were to be fast and free, highly bred, but with no show action, which he abhorred.

Mac sat down and considered. He knew of one—a bay—answering the description; he might find another. It was for him a fortunate opportunity, and he sat talking to the father-in-law he wanted, until both men were surprised to find how well they got on together, and how much they had to say to each other. Mac, talking of farming and money-making, was not the slipshod youth Mr. Slade believed him to be. They went out to tea together; Nancy's eyes lighting as she saw them.

"Given capital and ordinary luck, there must be money in horses," said Mac. "Look at these two you want. As a dealer, not selling to a friend, I could make a large profit on them. See?"

Mac was smiling, misfortune forgotten; yet, had he known, this apparent fortunate chance was to bring him one of his darkest hours.

Mr. Slade saw—almost genially; but when Mac drifted away, slipping across to Miss Slade, who succeeded rather cleverly in looking as if she had no one to wait upon her, Uncle James' fat, little form, his pink face smiling sweetly, came to Mr. Slade's side.

In the course of five minutes' conversation, he sweetly conveyed to Mr. Slade his regret as to Mac's great poverty. "Poor young fellow, almost wild for fifty

or a hundred pounds. Came to me . . . this week . . . but I am a business man, and there was no security. He's desperate, my dear sir, and I regret it."

Mac's face, smiling at Nancy across a teacup, looked far from desperate, but Mr. Slade looked at the young fellow thoughtfully, and Uncle James smiled. He was a spiteful little man—and he bore Murrough Macnamara the deep grudge of one who meets a wiser man than he has bargained for.

During the following week Mac left hunting alone, driving and bicycling and training from small dealer to dealer. He had shown the horse he had spoken of to Mr. Slade, a well-bred, bright bay sixteen hands, with black mane and tail, too light-middled for a good hunter, yet full of quality and with splendid action, straight and free and not overhigh. This treasure was discovered at Meleady's, and, after a week's searching, Meleady himself found a second.

"He'd travel the world," he announced proudly, "and not get two so like."

Mac approved, merely blinking a little when the dealer named a very high price for his pair. "Two hundred and fifty—and he'd dhrive them a week to harness for that same."

Mr. Slade's friend seemed to think nothing of it; he paid with cheerful alacrity, and wrote to say he was perfectly delighted with his purchases.

Every one was pleased. Mac and Mr. Slade had grown friendlier daily, when an evil fate brought Uncle James into the game. The little man was walking the pig-eyed grey on the sheltered side of a thick hedge, as they waited at a covert side, and it chanced that Meleady and a friend waited on the other, braving a bitter wind to get a start.



As they passed up and down, scraps of their conversation were borne, wind-battered, across the thick thorns. Meleady discussed the pair of bays and the God-sent purses of Englishmen. Not that they weren't worth the money—still, a hundred and fifty would have paid him well, and Mr. Macnamara could have got them for that. The wind tore out gaps, and bit out the last "could have," so that the substance wafted to Mr. James Rivers sounded as if Macnamara had paid Meleady a hundred and fifty and kept one hundred for himself.

His round face unusually thoughtful, a small man on a pig-eyed grey stole out of the shelter, tapping his boot as he crossed into the rush of the wind to talk to Pat Maguire.

Pat, in a new swallow-tail, was also waiting for his start, abusing the hounds for not leaving covert.

"No drive in them—he'll stay here all day," declaimed Pat, his eyes looking uneasily at the stiff country all round. Pat was more valorous in speech than in deeds. One of those men who are full of ingenious reasons for the misfortune which appears to dog them in each hunt.

One day a horse refuses, another they have to wait to pick up a fallen friend; sometimes a leather breaks; coming up on the road they are full of bewailing the wrong turn they took just at the beginning. The borrowed light of other men's glory is also a favourite device.

Some man talks of having been well in a great hunt. The shirker listening, smiles laudation. "Oh, yes; I saw you, just in front of me crossing by Kilduff."

"Maguire not in it?" says the good man and true, later. "Oh, I don't know. He was just behind me at Kilduff; he must have been there. I was lucky in the gallop with them all through."

Pat shivered now in the driving wind ; the swallow-tail was thin. He drained at an empty flask with a doleful air as Uncle James came up.

Evil seeds are easy to sow. Mac had wanted money badly . . . had asked him for it. Uncle James told his story, coming at it softly. Then, having shown Pat that there was something behind this idle gossip, he went on.

Macnamara apparently got hold of that hundred or so which he wanted.

"How did he do it?" snapped Pat, wiping his rain-wet face.

"Commission . . . perhaps one would call it that . . . upon those bay horses. . . . I was by the hedge just now." Uncle James told the story as he had gathered it.

"You heard that?" Pat glanced at Mac and Nancy, shivering happily in the elusive shelter of a thorn bush ; his eyes grew bright. He owed Mac a grudge . . . this might give him the opportunity to pay it off.

So he whispered it on, telling it lightly, as a piece of horse-dealing astuteness, to Nancy's father.

"That's the way to do business," said Pat genially, "isn't it now?"

"You're sure of this?" Slade glanced at him sharply.

"I overheard Meleady telling what he got," said Pat simply, well content with the elder man's expression—disgust warring with disbelief.

Pat was clever enough, knowing how quickly Mac would have been cleared, not to say anything of it to other people ; he told Uncle James to do likewise, with not a hint at Dunmore, for he guessed that Nancy's father would keep the tale to himself.

He did, but it rankled sorely. Liking for the young fellow had always lain under the outer coating of disapproval. As a suitor for his daughter he was obliged to disapprove, but as a companion, Carton Slade could never help feeling the charm which Mac's quiet manner could exercise. He had grown impressed, too, lately by Mac's hopes of his wonderful colt; fallen to hoping himself that they would prove true, so that he might see some better firm than those who worked with a coal bucket at work upon the old roof.

The outcome of this new friendliness had been the request for help in buying these horses. It seemed a horrible thing to have been cheated—the old man called it that. If Mac wanted money so very badly . . . he could have lent it . . . but to deliberately deceive, to name so high a price and keep some for himself; it hurt in its rough ugliness. Impossible to doubt, as Meleady had been overheard telling about it. When Mac, secure in their new friendliness, came to call, full of Forefront's great progress, he was surprised to find the older man cold, barely civil, taking no interest in the horse.

"We all trust your ideas may come to something," said Mr. Slade coldly. "Your affairs would do with a little prosperity."

Mac, stroking a puzzled lip, asked for the bay horses.

"My friend is satisfied. He did not"—Mac was fixed with a questioning eye—"think the price so exorbitant."

Now, because there was no shadow of guilt in his heart, Mac blushed, and his host sighed, almost bitterly. Honour was a high thing to him.

The butler showing Macnamara out, received quiet orders. For the future, not at home to this gentleman.

Nothing marked, above all no hint to Miss Slade, but Peters understood that Mr. Macnamara was not to be admitted.

Nancy soon felt the change in her father's manner towards Mac ; she was questioned over-closely as to her movements, forbidden to use her bicycle in the winter, was watched out hunting and in the town, until almost frightened by his grave looks, she asked the reason.

Unfortunately for Mac, no accusation was made.

"It is something . . . something I would rather not tell you," was all Nancy could hear.

Mr. Slade kept the story to himself, yet brooded over it sorrowfully, hurt more than he believed possible.

Mac, hurt and bewildered by barred door and change of manner, withdrew himself inside a barrier of hurt pride. Staying at home—desolate in his desolate house. His hunting was a farce ; the three-year-olds, brave as they were, could not carry him in the place he liked to be.

Pat Maguire, too, was always to be seen by Nancy's side ; she possessed a delicate method of snubbing this undesired admirer to a white heat of anger, and then, as she rode away, dropping some short word of kindness which made Pat imagine the snubbing to be mere girlish encouragement. Due also, he imagined, to the influence of Mac, for the snubs were very apparent and the kindness remote when Mac was near. Nancy Slade smiled a little to herself about it. Not so much as she would have if her father had not changed suddenly.

She asked Pat to tea, not once, but many times, carefully choosing afternoons when her parent was at home. His loud-voiced admiration seemed almost to her liking, and she would flit off leaving the men together with a bleak little smile on her lips when she returned, to find

them sitting in strained silence, or languidly discussing the crops.

"The most impossible young fellow," stormed Mr. Slade. "If he's not telling you about himself, he doesn't seem to have anything to say. . . ."

Nancy smiled vaguely.

"He has always heaps to say . . . to me . . . " she said pleasantly. "So handsome, too. Don't you think so, father? Such fine swallow-tail coats. I think really he's quite a Maguire."

Mr. Slade snorted—furiously. He could not understand his daughter.

Mac, very doleful, made his way to Dunmore, to talk to Shelia; he found her fresh from a depressing interview with Marcus Butler, yet ready to sympathize with him.

"The debts were bad enough, and poverty was bad enough, but I can't understand all this," said Mac dismally. "Slade was growing absolutely friendly, then—whiz!—he's round to the north like a shift of wind . . . and Nancy . . . " Mac's voice grew appealing. "She couldn't really encourage that anim . . . that cousin of yours, Shelia . . . all cook and no cousin . . . she . . . couldn't."

Shelia did not think she could.

"I bought those horses, toiled to find them . . . they were real good ones, yet something tells me he is annoyed about them. I met him in the club yesterday," groaned Mac; "he almost turned his back upon me . . . and I blushed . . . I always do when there's nothing to blush about."

So Mac grew sadder, seeing little of his love, living on rabbits and game in his half-ruined house. Misfortune dogging every horse he possessed except Forefront, who

improved daily. Creditors pressed him; land he valued seemed about to slip through his fingers. Nancy was haunted by Pat Maguire, who grew more obtrusively pleased with himself daily, until Mac's once cheery face grew weary and glum, a tired look rising in his blue eyes.

He slept badly; he woke to empty days when hope was dead in him. Uncle James' little sowing of evil had borne swift fruit.

Riding his grey upon the roads, the fat little man saw many things which pleased him: Mac's dreary face; the remote manner of Nancy's father.

"Disgraceful," murmured Mr. Rivers to himself. "A shocking way of getting what he wanted." His one regret that Pat would not allow him, on any account, to tell the story at Dunmore. To do Uncle James justice, he believed that he had told the truth.

The winter slipped away, January's bitter cold changing to soft winds of February. Earth woke again slowly, the bleak look of winter left the world. Hunting men grumbled, though the time of great runs was with them—the four-weeked month which brings its records to every hunt. There were good gallops in Cahervally; sweep of the pack across the green fields, and perfect fences which men, having once tried them, come again to ride over.

Miss Jane, on her little mare, would shiver with excitement when she saw one of these hunts. "Yoi-oi," the music driving down the wind; nearer and nearer; a lean face leaping at a fence, crash of a pied body, then another and another, till they drove together across the field. Thud of hoofs, a horse coming swiftly; the fliers of the hunt riding their own lines with set faces and glowing hearts. Along the road to watch them,



or if she could not move to a better place, to see the toiling ruck, following each other until each fence showed a brown track of hoofs; happy in their own way, funkling nothing, but lacking the initiative which would have kept them in front. Some one must give them leads, they could not choose a strange spot in the long green bank. Last of all the cautious ones, whose happiest moments were blank days, peering anxiously; turning away, coming back half-heartedly to jump and find how easy it was, landing happily at last on the high road. It seemed to bitter little Miss Jane, as she watched, that her place was in the forefront of the chase; that she felt the thrill of swift motion, the joy of the good horse stretching beneath her, the watching of the straining, flying pack in front. Through lines of gaps and gates, on bad scenting days, she had herself watched them puzzle out a cold line. Trying every inch, patient yet eager, keen, wistful faces down to earth, deep throats ready to cry it to the world when they found their line.

Uncle James, chuckling at GreyBoy's mouth, was inclined to think hounds a nuisance . . . they had unpleasant little ways of going away and leaving one with no way out of a field except the way one came in, and that which was an easy scramble down was a formidable ditch to jump back. He liked to air his pink coat, and found the exercise healthy, but he disliked hunting itself exceedingly.

Riding back on a February evening, after a good day, Nancy Slade found herself alone. Clouds, soft violet and blue, massed on the edge of an opal-tinted sky, so massive that they looked as a range of purple mountains, snowy crested, with a great plain stretching beyond—a cloud-desert, for the gods to drive over.

The girl was tired ; she drooped a little in her saddle, letting her little horse walk as he chose.

Clouds deep as that vapour-scape on the horizon were about her life—and Mac's. . . . She might scheme and fail.

The sharp trot of a horse behind her made her look round. It was Mac, bringing back a young one with two big knees. He half checked his horse when he saw her so that he did not come up.

" Oh ! I must find out what's wrong," thought Miss Slade impatiently.

## CHAPTER XV

### HOW MICKEY STOOPED TO CRIME

" The beams and blots that Heaven allots."—*Gordon.*

" I TELL ye I mislike the horse," said Mickey mysteriously, poking his weather-beaten little face in the library window. " Signs by he's a mare, but I mislikes him all the time. He came down with Misther Pat from the Curragh, an' Corbett—that's me cousin at the station—is prepared to swear he saw a whip-tail on him thin. A good rabbit 'd be ashamed of the scut on him now. . . . It's a racer they have to whip the race from the Collier, as sure as there's a God in hivin. An' will ye not see to it, yer honor ! "

Norman shook his head. It was extremely probable that Mickey was right ; it would be a distinct blow to him to lose the race, but as he said to his faithful factotum, " What could he do ? "

Soft winds ; muggy, steaming days were with them. Green spear-heads rose from the clumps of daffodils ;

lent-lilies bent delicate, pale gold flowers ; early prim-roses starred shady banks ; the breath of spring was in the air. Soon March, with his rasp of bitter wind and crisp cold frosts, would, putting on his black cap, condemn hunting to its yearly death. It took two horses now to see the long days out. Shelia's birthday drew near, and Norman thought cunningly of the roan horse which she had taken a fancy to. Pat Maguire had ridden it again, on a bad day in the hills, and Shelia looked at it enviously. "Just what I want for next season," she said, watching the roan scramble actively through the heather, and charge cleverly on a greasy, half-broken-down bank.

Fortune favoured Norman ; the long-legged Record Breaker improved under Tom's care into a particularly good-looking horse, so much so that Meleady found a buyer to give ninety for him. Norman rustled the cheque happily, looked so guilty through breakfast that his wife knew he meditated an extravagant present for the next day, and then took Mickey, Tom being away, across to Clonmony.

They walked across the fields, climbing the heavily padlocked gate into Pat's grounds. Years before Clonmony, then a mere square farmhouse, had been known as the steward's house. It stood upon poor land, so when offered a good price by Reidy, Shelia's father sold it, and a new masonry wall ran rawly along the boundary. One of the old stables, used now as a shelter for cows, still stood on Shelia's land, with the jaggedly coped wall ceasing at its crumbling sides.

"Great times they was thin," said Mickey. "'Twas the queer twist to sell this place at all. An' thim that was so anxious to get it, off out of it now. More betoken," he continued, lurching along, "there's some

one not above poachin' our woods. . . . I was out for the pasht three nights, but they're too clever for me." Mickey's sharp little nose worked as if he were a hunting terrier. "An' if I cot them," he said sadly—"even if I cot them——"

"Well?" asked Norman.

"We couldn't be disgracin' the family," said Mickey darkly.

Pat was at home. The easiness of his morning attire evidently caused him some confusion. A prickly growth of stubble adorned his chin; he was collarless, and his greasy, frayed-out coat had seen much life. The meteor-like vanishing of a female form, its face framed in screwed-up newspaper, suggested that his half-sisters were also unprepared for visitors.

When Norman asked for the roan, Pat wound his handkerchief round his neck and grew exceedingly cheery.

"Now that's the very horse for a lady," he said. "You've seen him jump. He's gentle and he's free, and but half done up yet."

Frantic clatterings and callings announced that the Miss Cassidys were dressing. A peevish voice from the kitchen shrilling a request for a "minnit's patience till I have me hands out of the suds."

The roan looked meaner in his box than he had out, but he was undoubtedly taking. A thick-set, showy horse, slightly on the common side; full of the power which always caught Shelia's eye.

Mickey slipped away, depriving Norman of competent help, but there seemed to be nothing wrong.

"The grandest goer you ever saw. A mouth like silk on him." Pat sang the roan's praises. "I'll give him a twist round the field for you."

Andy sped for saddle and bridle ; the roan came jauntily out into the untidy yard. Then Andy grunted dismay. The gate of the big field was locked ; they could only go into the paddock.

The paddock seemed about the most unsuitable galloping-ground in Ireland, its natural size being diminished by two stacks of straw, a hayrick, and three carts ; but the roan's manners were perfect ; cantering gently, he twisted and turned with circus-like precision, Pat sitting easily, guiding more with knees than hands. Norman's eyes grew bright. He got up himself, and though he did not quite like the feel the roan gave him, he knew that he and his wife did not like the same horses. There was absolutely no chance of stretching the horse, straw-stacks, carts, and hayricks being thick about him, but he cantered smoothly, and was handy as the proverbial dancing-master.

When Pat named sixty as the price, Norman almost whooped with delight.

"Just as you're anxious for it," said Pat magnanimously. "I'm not clearing a fiver on the deal." The question of soundness being settled by a week-old certificate signed by a well-known name, Norman, with boyish impatience, said he'd take the horse home with him, and was then delayed by the hurried arrival of Rosie and Violet, radiant in fine clothes, and distinctly short of breath.

They had, it appeared, been taking a stroll round, and never heard till that minute that Norman was inside.

Mickey, meantime, had returned from the empty kitchen with a grim look upon his face ; the open larder was stocked with game and rabbits.

He strolled along the yard until he chanced upon

Andy, with a bucket of oats, damped with steaming bran, in his hand. He was going to feed the animal which Mickey disliked, and which he admired now with unstinted ardour.

"A real nice bit of a pony, indeed, an' she is," said Mickey. "I see ye feeds her soft. Is it for harness now ye have that one?"

Andy winked his one eye and said it might be. "A nate little dog-cart mare," he said gravely. "An' for feedin' her," he added sourly, "ye'd be at her all day to coax her to ate an oat. Bran an' turnips or anything hot, but what's good for her she won't have."

"Is that so?" said Mickey thoughtfully. "The craythur! She should gallop too."

A meaning turn of his head brought Norman to the spot. The little hogged, docked mare had quality stamped all over her. A powerfully built, low brown made to gallop. She nosed at her feed disdainfully, more interested in picking straws from her bed.

"A little one I got from a farmer," said Pat glibly. "She looked like moving, so I bought her. I'll likely run her against your Collier, Norman. In fact, I'm sure to, to have something in."

Norman looked dubiously at the mare.

Attended by Pat and the rustling Miss Cassidys, he strolled across the fields to the boundary gate, Mickey leading the roan, when they left him. Just here, Mickey patting the roan's rather thick neck, turned to speak, his voice absent, his eyes on a distant wood.

"I forgot to tell ye, sor," he said. "I saw the one that's been poachin' our rabbits."

Norman, knowing his man, said nothing.

"I seen him last night, or rather to-day," said Mickey blandly; "but I think we'll let him off this time, an'



wait to see if he takes the warnin' not to come agin."

Rosie, catching sight of her half-brother, said she'd never seen the like of his colour, and was it to hurt himself somewhere he did.

Norman looked thoughtfully at Pat, then said good-bye.

"The price of him," was what Mickey said, when his master remonstrated with him.

"Sure as God sittin' above us, that's a racer they have; the mane and tail whipped off," said Mickey, as he and Norman walked homewards. "One a taste too slow for great work, but that'll have us all here. Ye couldn't be up to them two—an' meself pretendin' I thought she was for harness work. Kitty they calls her, swheet an' homelike . . . the divils."

Norman sighed. It would be part of the year's luck if his black horse was beaten, as if this mare was really smart he would be . . . the race was in three weeks' time and meant a great deal to him. They turned in at the gate, to find Shelia visiting Hannah Anne. She grew pink with delight when she saw the roan horse; ran round him with a child's enthusiasm; hugged Norman while, as Mickey said afterwards, he "looked to the wesht," and then must see her present gallop. Norman pattering out his tale of the grey's sale and his joy at being able to buy for her. Mickey trotted off for a saddle, and then Norman got up.

"You galloped him before, of course?" said Shelia, stepping back to admire.

"I . . ." Norman's face fell. "I'm afraid he was only cantered." He blushed as he met his wife's eyes.

Shelia smiled to herself as he started, taking the roan round the lawn; then the unexpected happened.

Norman caught his horse by the head to shake him from a wooden rocking-horse canter, and met with no response. He stuck his heels in—smote the roan hard ; it rocked on placidly, until, as he came back, it was only too apparent that a well-bred donkey would have galloped nearly as fast. Norman pulled up by Shelia, staring at her, as he told his story.

“Done !” he said slowly. “Done !” The locked gate, the gallop in the small blocked-up field, had been only too well arranged.

“He’ll do for a bus, if there are any left for horses to pull,” said Norman bitterly, sliding to the ground. “I wonder he dared——”

Shelia’s lip quivered for a minute. “Mr. Pat Maguire seems to get the best of us in many ways,” she said unevenly.

“Wait,” said Mickey. “Misther Pat . . . wait a-while.”

The roan horse found a happy home in a doctor’s brougham ; but when Pat inquired, Shelia said brightly that she had been enchanted and wanted to keep him, but they had been tempted by a good offer, so sold at once.

And Pat fell back thinking . . . deeply.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now it chanced that one of Shelia’s Guernsey cows fell very sick ; the herdsman was away, and Mickey volunteered to sit up all night to watch with the sick beast. It lay groaning in the half-ruined outhouse which was only separated by a wall from the end of the Clonmony farm buildings, a built-up door showing that at one time the houses had communicated. Mickey

sitting alone with his cow, thought long of the racer next door, until a ray of moonshine creeping through the broken roof showed a small square opening above the old rafters from which the loft floor had long dropped away.

He heard some one speaking.

"Holy Mary!" said Mickey, jumping up. "Kape alive, let ye," he whispered to the cow. Next minute he was climbing hard up the old wall, clinging to the rafters, peering and pushing at the opening. His hands, groping through a clammy curtain of cobwebs, touched dry old hay. With a squirm and a wriggle he dived into it, spluttering and choking in the dust as he worked through the old hay into fresh, and through that into a half-filled loft above a stable. Lying down, he peered through the square opening and saw a horse below him. In many old places the lofts communicate. Mickey slipped noiselessly on—to find that he could get to a second loft full of oats, but no further; then he stood still. "It might be here," he whispered.

Voices sounded below him—Pat's and Andy's. Mickey held his breath; he might hear something.

"Did she eat, Andy?"

"She did well enough. I'm gettin' her on to it, though she got through fire for the soft food," in Andy's harsh voice. "She'll ate well enough to be three lengths in front of Misther Norman's, anyways—the harness mare. Laws! That damn simple ass, Mickey!" Andy rasped out a grunt of contempt, and Mickey peered down. "If he knew what she was!"

"Hush!" said Pat.

Mickey was then just above Kitty's stable. He was right. This was a racer, bought to beat his master.

The hay-racks had been taken away; there was room

for a small man to slip down. A light, not from heaven, suddenly illumined Mickey's face. The "damn simple ass" had thought of something.

He returned swiftly to his cow, which, having taken his advice, still groaned miserably, and sped homewards to his cottage, where, without rousing his old mother, he lighted the fire and concocted a cunning mess of Indian meal and turnips, all of which he slipped in a covered "tinkan" and ran back again, trailing a light ladder with him. The cow still moaned heavily, but he could do nothing for her until the vet came. It was easy now to get into the loft, to squeeze into the second, and then, in the chill of the dawning, to drop beside the astonished mare, Kitty, and uncover his can. She buried her mouth in it greedily; this was to her liking, and she finished it to the end before she raised her head. Mickey took off his necktie, wiping her muzzle clean, and then, with some difficulty, got from the manger back into the loft.

"That simple ass meself," he muttered, as he wormed through the hay.

Next morning, about twelve o'clock, saw Mickey in Clonmony yard, asking for the loan of a bit of string to tie up a harness on his ass cart. Andy, his one eye full of malevolence, was coming from Kitty's stable; he lent the string and gave vent to his annoyance.

"There's Mr. Pat away, and not one oat would the mare touch to-day," he grumbled. "Ye'd think she was full the way she turned from thim. She'd break the heart on ye, that one," groaned Tom.

"But isn't roots besht for her?" said Mickey the simple, fiddling with his string.

"An' the masther lettin' her off for the flat race! Lawks! God save ye!" said Tom crossly. "For a

bit ov a mare," he added hurriedly, "she can thravel."

Mickey went slowly away. He knew it was useless to go to Norman. No rows—impossible. His answer was foredoomed. Even if it were proved that Pat had bought something just too slow to win with in good company, Norman would merely shrug his shoulders.

"So God bless the hole in the wall an' the small size of meself," thought Mickey as he shambled away to abstract two stone of Indian meal from the bin in the yard.

The days slipped away before the race which was to try the speed of the hunters from several counties.

But Kitty, late Creewood Lass, sweated and puffed at her work—Andy swearing in acute desperation. She looked well, her coat shone, she put on flesh; but she absolutely refused her morning and midday feed, nibbling delicately later on.

Andy spared no pains; he haunted the box, he fed her five times a day, he tried expensive tonics, he kept the key of the stable in his pocket; but for once in his crooked life he was absolutely at fault.

"The fairies is in it," muttered one-eyed Andy to the mare. "Four pound of corn yesterday, an' ye like a washerwoman's tub out to-day, the lather stud on ye on ye gallopin'."

Could he have seen a small man, "tinkan" in hand, slipping along the boundary wall in the grey of the dawning, unearthing a ladder in the shed, and finally putting a hot mess of bran and turnips and Indian meal under Kitty's eager nose, he would not have put the mare's condition down to the little people's interference. Kitty had learnt to watch for the coming of the food she loved. She whinnied softly now, instead

of snorting at the faint pad of feet on the loft, for Mickey came daily.

Andy wrote to Pat, his master, to say he couldn't get the mare to eat.

On the morning of the race Mickey came in the darkness lest Tom should be on the watch, his pockets bulging with two quart bottles of warm water to mix with a mess of bran and meal, peering into the quiet yard, listening to the dog's hoarse bark—fortunately he barked all night—then dropping down for the last time with his feed.

Some hours later, shaven and neatly clothed, he started for the races, smiling in purest joy.

Pat had been at the Curragh, the attractions there keeping him from home. He swaggered in the paddock, radiant as Mickey's smile, his friend, Sir Charles, with him, his glance at Norman, standing by his black horse, being almost lofty.

A month hence he would claim his rights. Already Butler spoke of the wisdom of settlement. Pat was absolutely jubilant. He spoke to Nancy, impressing upon her the joy of his return. With an eye upon her father she received the greeting pleasantly, going with Pat to see the horses.

Shadowed by the story which he knew nothing of, Mac walked apart, his once quietly merry face drawn and downcast. Forefront was never better, but if the win did not mean Nancy, it turned bitter in the plucking. Her father would not speak to him; she herself absolutely encouraged Pat Maguire. Jealousy, green-eyed, sharp-toothed, a fox to gnaw at a Spartan heart, went with him through the clouded day. He paused by Norman to look at the Collier. The black horse was fit as hands could make him, all the better for his



regular hunting—hard and muscular, with none of the staleness arising from over-galloping, which amateurs so often err in.

“He must win, Norman.”

Norman shrugged his shoulders. “Mickey tells me that Kitty, Pat’s mare, is undoubtedly a racer which he has smuggled down from his cousin. He seems to burst with confidence.”

Pat, arms crossed, was talking to Sir Charles, and the gentleman rider he had tempted down to steer his mare to victory.

“There won’t be one near her and she coming in,” boasted Pat happily.

Had he spent the last ten days at home he would not have been so confident. Andy had merely written to say she would not eat. He passed over, in silence, the fairy-sent latherings and puffings when Kitty did her work. To sweat and lather on dry oats and hay was too strange to recount.

Pat’s cousin, the trainer, looked at the arriving Kitty glumly. “She’d want to have a lot in hand to win, mud fat like that,” he said.

“Fat! Andy said she wouldn’t eat.” Pat lifted the check rug. He stared at the glossy-coated mare, sweating a little now. She was in good health, but—he turned upon Andy.

“I declare to the hivins above us she’d niver taste a bit till two o’clock,” grumbled Andy miserably. “What she fattened on the divil himself knows.”

“The divil?” murmured Mickey as he stood near, ready with a greasy note to back Norman’s horse.

Pat stared and muttered. Andy had never lied to him. He could not understand it.

A whisper slipped abroad. . . . Kitty, the little

short-tailed mare, was made favourite . . . a proceeding which wiped the smile from Pat's beaming face . . . making him snarl sharply. Sir Charles, who had been told to look upon the race as over, plunged recklessly. Captain Hanbury backed his own mount.

The Collier stood at fours, and Murrough Macnamara, coming listlessly up to the yelling ring, pulled out a sum of money representing a promising two-year-old and lumped it on. It buoyed the Collier up a point in the betting.

As he turned away he saw Mr. Slade gazing at the swaying, hoarse-voiced bookies with a disapproving eye, and Uncle James' plump little form busily engaged, his back view looking argumentative.

Mac ignored the cool greeting. "Put a sovereign on the Collier, sir," he said.

"I never bet." Slade's hands went to his pocket.

"Risk it . . . for once; the right man may win."

Mr. Slade pulled out a shining yellow piece. It was reft from him as he breathed the Collier's name by a raucous-voiced penciller, a gaudy ticket, which he hastily concealed, being thrust into his hand. Then something in Mac's quiet face touched him. As he moved on he wished aloud, petulantly, that he had never seen the bay horses. Mac heard him; he looked up swiftly, piecing things together. This new coldness dated from the finding of the carriage horses. Some mischief had been made, some untruth told, and it must ooze to him through the back door. Meleady, he knew, admired Nancy's French maid. Mac went straight to the dealer, telling him what he suspected. Then he went on to Norman, who was getting up on the Collier. "Good luck!" he cried.

"It means a lot to me," said Norman. "Yet . . . I am afraid of that hogged mare."

"That one'll niver throuble ye," said Mickey emphatically. "I tell ye she won't."

Norman eyed his man suspiciously.

"She's too—sthout," said Mickey sweetly. "Could Mrs. Henessy, now, run a race?"

Norman, eyeing the gigantic lady in question—she kept a sweet stall just outside the railings—said she could not.

Now the tale of that foolish thing, a hunter's flat race, is soon told. Pat, too heavy to ride himself, had asked Captain Hanbury to take the mount. He airily told the spare little soldier to make what use he liked of the mare, and win by a few lengths at the end. But Hanbury's view of that particular race was one of tails and hind legs. Kitty lathered before they had gone a quarter of a mile; when they passed the stand for the first time she was toiling hopelessly beaten in the rear, and was pulled up long before the end, white from crest to tail, and panting miserably. Norman raced from the bend with the Collier, and, wearing down Major Halford's thoroughbred, won comfortably by two lengths.

In the paddock an agitated trio circled about a blown, fat brown mare. The well known rider who had come from the Curragh to win peevishly stated that the mare had been trained on bran; Pat refuting the statement and abusing Andy, who could only murmur of the fairies; and the three were haunted by the pink-faced, furious presence of Uncle James, who had lost two pounds, ready money, and wished to do some one an injury.

When Pat snapped out that Hanbury had made too much use of his mare, and Hanbury had retorted

that he was not accustomed to riding bran pies on a race-course, and the two had glared at each other, breathing hard, Uncle James throatily agreed with Pat. Whereupon both men asked him at once, "What the devil he knew about it?" and went off to have a drink, leaving Uncle James muttering.

Mickey, folding up five greasy one-pound notes, came softly to Andy, whose one malevolent eye was positively misty from sorrow.

"Before God . . . the fairies was in it," he said, looking up at Mickey.

Mickey undid the notes, patting them happily.

"Put a sprig of mountain ash above the dour," he whispered confidentially. "Ye'll see she'll change for ye then."

Andy sighed bitterly. He had suffered many words from his master and fellow rogue, Pat. "I'll thry it," he said.

Norman was happy that afternoon; he put away his troubles, rating Mac, who was gloomily pocketing large sums of money, for his grumpiness.

"The clouds are lifting, man—cheer up!" said Norman.

Mac looked at the sky. Purple, heavy clouds were gathering, not lifting there, crowding into mass heavily across the blue, ere they flung down their burden of water.

"Not for me," said Mac quietly, and told his trouble.

Then to him, bubbling with wrath, came Meleady, and for the first time Mac knew the meaning of the chill shadow which for a month had darkened his life.

"I have it all out of Miss Slade's motor dhriver, that heard it in the house." Meleady, telling his tale, "blemt" himself for having spoken foolishly.

"I minds now I saw that little old Mr. Rivers comin'

round from the far side of the hedge. 'Twas a windy day, an' if he but heard half what we said he might have put a construction on it."

Mac's pale face grew whiter. He turned to look at Uncle James, who was moodily studying the bookmaker he had lost his two pounds to.

"So . . . he set that idea going. Some small return, doubtless, for having laughed at him," said Mac between clenched teeth. "He knew I wanted money."

He stood looking out across the white-railed course to the misty hills beyond the river. So easy a thing to suggest; a tale a business man would believe more readily than one versed in clean-fingered horse dealing. But . . . so much to him. He knew now why Nancy's eyes had been dark with pain; why her father's house had been shut to him.

"Two," murmured Mr. Macnamara, looking again at Uncle James, "can be nasty."

A minute later Miss Slade, looking idly at the horses, felt a touch upon her arm; was removed to a remote corner of the paddock, and put upon her trial.

"Nancy, I've just heard. Did you believe this thing?" asked Mac quietly.

Her eyes answered him.

Mac drew a deep breath. He looked up at the purple clouds, to see a shaft of golden light flicker across a break.

"I couldn't breathe it to you; it was too horrible to mention," she faltered. "That little Uncle James came with a long tale, and it hurt father, I know it did. He only told me . . . a day or two ago."

"It was a clever tale. But thrown mud spatters," said Mac. "Also, it stains the thrower's hands. I'll go straight to your father."

He walked across, a slight, almost shabby, figure to where Mr. Slade stood. . . .

"They told you an ugly, a clever story of me, sir," he said. "Told it prettily, I understand, and I did want money. But there are things men do not do, and . . ."—his eyes flashed—"I am either fit to be spoken to . . . or I am not."

Nancy's father looked at him; the sordid little scandal rolling up as a scroll. "I am ashamed," he said quietly. "And if you will——" He held out his hand with a breath of honest relief.

Mac took it.

"Then the bargain of the thousand holds good?" said Mac, looking at him squarely.

"Of course"—Slade sighed a little—"or holds bad, my boy . . . for I really fear my girl must look elsewhere. I'll take her away in the spring . . . to forget Cahervally. . . ."

A jealous lover's vision of Monte Carlo . . . of blue skies and flowers and endless rounds of gaiety, chilled Mac.

"But wait till Forefront wins his race," he said happily.

As they left the paddock to get some tea they met the damped presence of Uncle James, marching gloomily through a world which had cheated him.

Mac, his face set sweetly, stopped. In gentle, dulcet tones he asked how much Uncle James had won over the Collier. Torn between a desire to expose his injury and fear of appearing disloyal to Norman, Mr. Rivers merely grunted his disapproval of betting.

Mac said playfully that Uncle James was a sly dog, for he had been seen making bets. He took Mr. Slade's arm. "We backed him," he said, watching the little



man's sugary expression crack. "And with the proceeds we are going to buy horses. For choice, bays—match carriage horses," said Mac. "They pay me, you see."

Uncle James, knowing himself discovered, turned a pretty pink.

When Dunmore rejoiced next morning, Norman found Mickey by his side. "It was the most extraordinary thing," he said. "The mare could have beaten us. Why did they train her like that? She might be, as they say, a bad feeder—or it might be——"

"It might . . . or it might be the little taste of bran and male she'd ate airily in the mornin's, afore the dawn," said Mickey seraphically. "She was made for the soft food——"

"Mickey!" thundered Norman, staring at him.

"Them that bought a race-mare to bate ye deserved it," replied his man placidly, and he told his story.

"You—you—ruffian!" gasped Norman. "You . . . such ruffianly roguery!"

"An' it costin' me four shillin's' worth of yer own male, not speakin' of two neckerchers wore out from wipin' her mouth," said Mickey, aggrieved. "Savin' that mare from the hunger."

Norman leant against the stable door and gave it up. He laughed long and immoderately, shamelessly blind to his man's behaviour; then he hastened to Shelia.

Whether Pat suspected treachery or not, he looked very bitter when they met him; but Andy, finding his charge grow slimmer daily behind her rowan-guarded door, lauded it to all his friends and relations.

"Down from the skies she was bewitched," he said. "For days afther the race, I declare ye'd see her stharin' up an' bawlin' for the fairy to light down."

## CHAPTER XVI

## FOREFRONT'S FIRST RACE

"I'd give a hundred pounds," observed Pat Maguire earnestly, "if that horse Forefront'd go wrong before next Friday."

Coming prosperity, the certainty of money, were tasteless to him just then ; for Mac's pale face was once more carelessly humorous. He had almost enjoyed the seizing of his horses, carried out by a vicious friend of Pat's, and had pressed upon the bailiffs, who were grumpily ashamed, a lame cart mare, a sick foal, and Catty the goat . . . the latter they were to take themselves.

The bailiffs, knowing perfectly well that all Mac's horses were farmed out in the stables of his friends, merely growled and muttered—skirmished a little with Catty, led the lame mare as far as the swing-gate, where they abandoned her, and returned to the irate debtor to bitterly remark that "there was no sellin' value in rats an' goats, an' them same was all they could see ; to say nothin' of an ould broken-legged mare that a float should be sent for."

"I would indeed," repeated Pat. "A hundred pounds to see that great horse of his beaten."

Uncle James, consuming borrowed cigarettes, inquired softly how horses could be stopped.

"A bucket of water the morning of the race ; a little taste of something in their bran," said Pat sharply, eyeing his companion. Then, after a prolonged silence, "It would pay for the grey horse."

"The stable door," said Uncle James, without appearing to understand, "is always locked. No one goes in alone." Then he left Pat Maguire, strolling home deep in thought.

Forefront's box was secured by a strong padlock, and just as Mr. James Rivers reached the yard he saw the racer's man unlocking the door to give the horse his oats. A modicum of admiration gained the little man entrance, but little else, for Forefront, mildest of horses, was hungry, and chased him, open-mouthed, from his box.

Uncle James shook his head . . . more thoughtfully than before. He looked at the window, and he walked back to the house humming a gentle tune.

These early March days were full of hope for Mac, full of bitter interviews and hopeless thoughts for Shelia. They had, with true Irish elusiveness, put off the evil hour; now, all the drearier for its long stand upon the doorstep, it said that it must enter. Fears for some of the old pictures and silver haunted Shelia; her fresh face lost its look of serene youth; she went silently about her home, trouble perched upon her shoulder.

It hurt her to see Pat's swallow-tailed form at the meets, to hear him boast and chatter, making his inheritance into unheard-of vastness.

"Oh, he'd make a new gorse for the hunt next year. There was one wanted up by Tulloun." Cheap swagger finds its admirers, and a certain amount of people listening took Pat at his own high valuation.

Rosie was engaged to a young officer. Pat had promised them a generous allowance. To talk of "me brother-in-law, the captain," was a pleasing thought.

But boast and strive as he might, he got no nearer to the goal of Miss Slade's affection, and every gentle snub

she dealt him he put down to the instigation of Murrough Macnamara. Yet she kept him dangling by her, in public, in a curious way—annoying Mac horribly.

The idea of that poverty-stricken young man winning a race at Sheeragh, and making, beside the stake of £150, a large amount in bets, was galling to Shelia's cousin.

He swaggered down once or twice to see the colt, frowning as he looked. No professional could have got a horse to look better. Forefront's coat threw off a bloom; he was muscular and not too big, absolutely full of himself in his daily gallops, never off his feed, easy to manage. Golden dreams would have danced before the eyes of a less sanguine man; to Mac they were diamond-studded, and bound about with the mystic circle of matrimony.

Nancy, coaxing delicately, managed to convey to her father that Sheeragh races were the only things she could not miss. There was a certain hat with a knot of pink and white—Mac's colours—on it. Since the races he had abandoned constraint and spoke openly of what the race might mean. Nancy, looking wise, said little except that there were often two roads to places, and asked Pat Maguire to tea.

He came, to worry her father with loud-voiced boastings and ill-judged remarks about what he'd do with his money.

"It is not, after all, a million," observed Mr. Slade irritably.

"No, but a fine lump sum," said Pat, wondering if Nancy meant all the snubs for girlish allurements. "Enough for a chap to marry on," he said meaningly.

"Oh, no doubt. Good Lord!" Mr. Slade got up noisily, clattering over a table, his eyes on his only daughter.

He had been uneasy before—now he grew positively worried. Mac, even as a pauper, would be better than this.

Miss Slade perched on the arm of her father's chair later on. "Mr. Maguire will come up racing," she said sweetly; "he's growing quite sporting, isn't he?"

Her father, in almost savage accents, observed suddenly that he hoped to God Forefront would win.

Miss Slade yawned as she swept her parent with the tail of a twinkling eye. "But even if he does, it will only be a hundred or two," she said. "And as you've often said, father, no one goes on making money of horses."

When her father had testily remarked that he objected to everything he said being hoarded up and repeated, Nancy kissed him and went away. But she danced a little dance in her own room and seemed very much pleased with herself.

She was not surprised at breakfast next day to hear her father discuss their trip abroad.

"I'll take you away for a year, directly this race is over," he said.

"H'm!" said his daughter softly. "That is, if I don't marry, father; I may, you know."

During the days before the races Tom's heart grew warmer towards Uncle James. "He takes a rale dacent interest in Misther Mac's horse," said the groom in commendatory accents. "Every time we feed him he's down to see how he is."

The race was on a Friday. Forefront, fit as human hands could make him, was to leave on Wednesday morning, and on Tuesday, as the crack stood waiting for his feed, Uncle James was, as usual, one of the admiring audience, his blue eyes still full of thought.



Then softly he asked Tom to accept a cigar, and on the groom assenting, tossed it towards him, his knife with it. With a yell Tom sprang forward, for the knife had opened on its way, and was travelling, blade first, straight at Forefront's quarters. Quick as lightning the groom struck it aside, not quite fast enough, for the steel had grazed the shining skin, and the colt, terrified, plunged away, snorting.

"What—an—accident!" gasped Uncle James.

"If I didn't see it 'twas stuck straight into him," panted Tom. "Ye whirled it that shwift, an' how it opened I don't know. Praises be to God it didn't hurt him. To go off his feed even now might lose him the race."

Uncle James, much flustered, went outside. His apologies were contrite and profuse. The blade must have caught in his button-hole. He was really upset—desolated.

He was down many times during the afternoon, to hear that Forefront was off his feed for an hour, but ate it after a time.

The Sheeragh races were held upon a bright day in early March. A cold east wind blew, but gently, so that it was hot in the sunshine. Distances showed clearly across the billows of grassland, a crowd surged outside the course. Tents had sprung up in the night. There were the inevitable long boards on trestles covered with yellow, pink-sugared buns; with apples, hard and small as marbles, stacks of gaudy sugar-stick, and great plates of the pigs' feet the Irish delight in chewing between races, with yellow buns to follow, and poisonous whisky to wash both down with.

The black wooden railings enclosed a different crowd: the habitués of the Irish turf: jockeys, trainers, owners;



the men who came to look on ; business-like women and smart women strolling in the sheltered paddock, coming round to the front where the wind blew coolly.

Among the rings of pacing horses Forefront walked placidly as a lamb. People looked at the colt, saw No. 4, 1st race, heard some whispers of his reputation, and turned away to watch April Showers, a flashy, white-legged chestnut who was reputed to have the race at her mercy, and Red Danger, a bay fancied by his own stable.

Nancy, flitting round Forefront, was pale from anxiety. She knew what the proving of his colt meant to Mac.

The overdressed person of Mr. Pat Maguire, in a wonderful assortment of check clothes, was never far away from her, and her father eyed him bleakly.

Mac had begged and borrowed and all but stolen money to back his horse with. April Showers opened a hot favourite at evens, with Red Danger well backed at twos. Forefront was at eights. At this price Mac put his money on, and then went back to his horse wonderful, guessing what would happen if he lost.

He had tried the colt highly, yet home trials were sometimes mistaken. April Showers had raced before. Forefront might swerve, run greenly, dwell at the gate. Certainties had been easy to talk of at home ; they grew pale here when it came to the sternness of actual business.

He had done what he could—improvised a gate, ridden the horse out in company ; he could not improvise the yelling crowds, the excitement of the real thing.

But the horse walked past him quietly as though at exercise, passing out of the narrow gate, cantering down over and taking the low fence before the stand as if he had done it all his life. Mac drew a deep breath, and Mr. Slade touched his elbow. The elder man's manner

was absent and gloomy ; he seemed to be thinking of something far away, and not much of the racing.

" I won five pounds through your tip at home," he said. " What about here, eh ? "

" I fancy my own, sir," said Mac, his eyes glued to his horse.

" Ye-es—My Own." Mr. Slade glanced down his card. " Pink and purple halved—yes." He looked back at his daughter ; she was pressing money into a bookmaker's hands, and just beside her was Mr. Maguire.

" Damn ! " observed Mr. Slade sharply to himself. " Thank you, Macnamara," and he went off muttering. " Pink and purple halved." His inquiry as to the price of Pat Maguire's being received bleakly by a plethoric individual in checks, he hurriedly changed it absently for My Own—took twenty to two—wrote it down, and strayed back again, tapping his card and concealing the ticket.

" What did you get ? " Mac asked.

" Ten to one," said Mr. Slade abstractedly.

Mac, with a smothered cry, dived from the stand, hailed the first man he saw, and rushed back again, relieved. But in his absence the crowd had surged up and hidden Mr. Slade, and he had to squeeze to a corner, where he stood alone.

Cling ! They are off ! Forefront had sprung into his stride as collectedly as if he had been at home. They swung past the stand in the clear sunlight, thud and thunder of hoofs, swish of silken jackets, Red Danger pulling hard in front, April Showers lying fourth, on the rails, Forefront striding along easily. He was a perfect fencer, seeming to slide rather than spring across the fences, yet clearing each one accurately and gaining a length or two as he jumped. Round again ; they

would win now! Something throbbed very hard in Mac's ears; the hands he held the glasses with were icy cold. "April Showers!" A yell from the crowd. "She's won it! She has! No, Red Danger! He's beat! What's *that*!" Another yell. Forefront, sweeping past them, holding them as whips went up . . . past quarters, girths, muzzles, swinging into the straight with two clear lengths to spare.

Mac laid down his glasses.

And then . . . the colt was young. He had never faced this roaring sea of humanity; he hung on his bits, swerved clean across the course on the rails, and the favourite had pushed, dashed past him amid a new roar of joy. She carried money, but her jockey rode her hard, for at her girths was a little brown mare answering every call with a bull-dog's tenacity. The boy on April Showers drove his mare on, the little brown answered; locked now one nose in front—now the other, whips singing, heels home, hands working.

Mac, feeling a little sick, leant back against the side of the stand. A fresh spurt. Forefront's rider had straightened the colt, pulled him together, and was coming twice as fast as the others on an unbeaten horse, close in on the rails, seen by few, for all eyes were on the great race in the centre of the course.

"He's won after all!" Mac yelled it aloud. As the two rolled past the judge's chair, and no man could have sworn which nose was in front, the big colt on the rails had passed them, dashed in, a winner by half a length.

"What's won? Which is it?" Mac laughed running to meet his horse, then stopped aghast, looking up at the numbers:

10, 3, 8.

The unknown brown first, April Showers second, Red Danger third. His horse, the winner . . . where? The judge, all eyes for the finish, straining every nerve to see which had won, had never seen the bay colt flash in just below him.

There was a murmur as of a stormy sea. So dying away, swallowed by the disappointment of the favourite's defeat.

A friend of Mac's caught his arm—looking at the white face. "He won," said Mac piteously.

"I saw it, but there's no appeal. Never mind, old fellow, the horse will do something big yet. Here's Trafford on the offer already, I think."

Mac turned away; the bitterness of failure was about him; he drowned in the chill, black, lurid tide. Silently he went on, listening to the hubbub and the comment, and met Mr. Slade staring at a racing ticket with round eyes.

"Tear it up, sir," said Mac wearily.

"But . . ." Mr. Slade plunged at the check-clothed bookie and held it up—in return a stream of notes and gold poured into his hand. "I . . . you said, 'My Own' . . . I was absolutely at sea . . . and I backed her by mistake. I was absent and quite forgot Forefront, but it seemed providential. No. 10, My Own. I wrote the number down."

Mr. Slade counted the notes, jubilant as a schoolboy.

"And . . . I . . . have lost . . . everything." Mac laughed a little. "Lost . . . when I really won. I'll sell the colt to-night. The roof"—his mouth twisted—"the roof will always leak now, sir."

Across his astonished senses it suddenly drifted that Mr. Slade was assuring him it would not—that the greasy notes and two sovereigns were being held

out to him as if they would pay for all—that Nancy's father declared racing and betting to be no bad game after all, and swore he would yet win many pounds over Forefront. Also Mac was a good fellow—those twenty pounds had made his heart soft. And there were other reasons.

Then to them as they talked came Nancy, holding back her tears. Behind her, looming largely, was Pat Maguire—a smile of absolute content upon his face.

"He—oh, Mac, he's glad!" cried Nancy, gulping.

Her father eyed her sternly. "I," he said, "am about to settle Mr. Macnamara's affairs, and should you still wish it"—here he glanced at Pat Maguire—"you can consider yourselves engaged. In fact, I insist upon it," he flared, in sudden heat.

"Oh—we—don't—mind—much," said Nancy meekly. Mr. Slade, remembering his own youth, withdrew, holding off Pat's advances, while Mac held his forehead and murmured that when he woke it would be all right.

"I lose a race—all my money, and because your father backs the right horse, by mistake, everything's all right," said Mac; "that if—if you want me now, Nancy——"

"I think I said there were always two ways of doing things," said Miss Slade easily. "If you disappeared . . . you see . . . papa thought that I liked . . . that," she glanced towards the check suit, and a light dawned upon Mac.

"You flirted with him—encouraged him," he gasped—and paused.

"To open the second gate," she said softly. "To roof the house, Mac, and plant the garden. Horses, you see, are always chancy."

Bright sunshine overhead—rasp of cool wind—little



fluffy clouds puffed on a sea of blue. Hum of voices about them, and the irate presence of Mac's jockey and groom wondering when the owner would come. To two young people it was none of this, but a sun-framed portal raised to show a golden, wondrous future. They stared at each other—mute, while Mr. Slade skirmished with the impatient Pat.

Mac came down to things mortal. "Very clever," he said; "but it's just as well for you, Nancy, that this is the paddock."

"I wonder," said Miss Slade thoughtfully.

Her father came nearer. "Mr. Maguire wishes to know," he said, "if you are not going to have some champagne with him?"

Miss Slade turned sweetly. "We will all drink champagne," she said, "to celebrate . . . my engagement."

"What!" said Pat. "Why the horse lost! Mac, I thought . . ." In his own mind he had looked upon Mac as completely ruined, swept happily from his path by his horse's ill-luck.

"But papa won so much over the other, he's going to do up Mac's house and help him to keep racers." Here Mr. Slade almost jumped. "And dig up his garden . . . and everything."

"Won over the other—My Own? Who in God's name told you of that?" stormed Pat, his mind a shattered chaos.

"I did," said Mac simply.

Pat sat down upon a bookmaker's box heavily.

Pat did not join them as they drank each other's healths; he went away, and Mr. Slade, left alone, pulled out his twenty pounds and looked again at it.

Then he smiled and followed his daughter.



## CHAPTER XVII

## WHAT LAY IN THE OLD BOOK

“Falsely, falsely have ye done.”—*Tennyson*.

MARCH winds, chill and bleak ; March sunshine, glaring and hot, dried the earth. There were black frosts at night, nipping the world to chillness, grey dawns, and cloudless, dusty days. Hunting was over. Hoofs rang now upon the hard, white roads, old hunters landed delicately over fly fences, dreading the jar. Banks broke away with splatters of dry brown earth beneath dwelling feet. The plough was at work in the tillage, and it was time to give up all hopes of sport. No scent would hold over the frost-nipped, sun-scorched grass ; one might get a fox away, but heads were up in two fields, and a funereal crawl on a stale line was all that could be hoped for. In the woods, where the shadows held the moisture, they could hunt still, but the woods held vixens, precious as good red gold ; a fox must be viewed now before there was full leave to hunt him.

To finish the season, Caher Castle ; there being no foxes there, one could put hounds in freely. A new and over-zealous keeper was blankly stared at in Cahervally, but the adjoining coverts held, and if the glass would but fall—the rain come—one more gallop might keep memory green until next year.

Sunshine outside and in for Murrough Macnamara, as he watched the workmen set to work upon his house, and hustled them until they nearly fell from his roof, but the chill of frost alone seemed to dwell at Dunmore.

The guests talked of flitting for a time. ‘Uncle James’ cheque was often spoken of as he strutted about, pitying

his nephew with a galling insistence. Norman had won his race, ready money was not lacking, yet the shadow of the future was dark before them.

The money must go; should Pat insist, and they had no hope of his not doing so, certain valued pictures and silver must go too. There was an ache in it, ever present, a throbbing pain, that money he was never meant to have should pass to the ex-cook's son. Provision had been made for him. He had never been intended to have more. And no fabled frog swelled more hugely than Pat did when settlement was imminent. Miss Slade's engagement soured his temper; he had plotted against Mac and failed; now he wanted to hurt some one. So he hurt Shelia and Norman as much as he could—strolled across to see them, touching raw nerves with his boasts; saw them wince, smiling to himself; bought things he did not want, just to take to show them. Asked advice as to the hanging of the pictures in his own house—offered if they couldn't manage to keep it up to take the motor off their hands.

An infinite capacity for patience seemed to have come to Shelia, that she bore it all quietly, and never once showed what it meant to her.

Mac would have helped Norman to order Pat to keep away; Shelia was feminine and wiser, too proud to let him see her hurt.

But the clouds were black above her neat, fair head, and there were hours when she threw her pride away and sobbed her heart out pitifully as any child. Even Mickey's cheeriness passed at this time. He fingered the triggers of his gun, muttering, "God bless them that has no conscience," to himself. The weeks, slipping on, brought the inevitable almost upon them. On the second day of April, Shelia was to affix her

signature to certain papers, and Maguire could consider himself master of what seemed to him a boundless sum.

During the sunny March days Mr. James Rivers and Miss Brown had been much thrown together. They walked in the sheltered garden, in paths bordered with a blaze of yellow daffodils, and grew friendlier hourly. Aunt Jane envied Norman's uncle his vast possessions; Uncle James spoke feelingly of the possibilities of mines—especially of copper and gold—both of which Aunt Jane seemed to hold. Yet she was both diffident and reticent, with none of the airy touch with which Uncle James described his fortunes. Everything seemed rising—prosperity before him; he jingled some loose silver in his pocket, and whispered softly into the little spinster's ear. She was lonely . . . hopes of riches and companionship floated before her faded eyes.

So the day of the meet at Caher came to a curiously minded household. It was a still, cold morning; grey mists still lying in the hollows, with the sun coming fiercely out to suck the world to dryness. An east wind blew faintly, stirring the budding thorns, the willow tassels by the shallow river; primroses raised shy yellow heads on sheltered banks. The motor sped them to the meet in a grey veil of dust; there seemed no hope of any sport.

A last meet is always a large one, be the weather what it may. Doubtful tendons, jarred feet, lame hocks, can rest until the following autumn. The blister pot is making ready in the stables, so the old slave or the young crock can only make matters a little worse to-day.

Sweetlass, hanging her pretty little head, awaited Miss Jane. Tom said she had a touch of a cough, and was a bit more off her feed than usual, but she might as well come out. So Aunt Jane slipped her light form

on to the mare's back, petting the chestnut softly, whispering to her almost tearfully—for she really loved the mare—of a long summer's rest.

The Caher woods were drawn blank, as every one knew they would be, despite the eloquent protests of the keeper concerning lost fowl. Protests received coldly even when one hen was found, new slain, upon an open ride.

Then they moved on to draw another wood, and from that to a gorse covert which was seldom blank.

Uncle James, trotting the pig-eyed grey along, was full of thought. He nodded his head once or twice, and spoke so civilly to Meleady that the horse dealer was full of amazement.

They drew the wood blank too, though hounds spoke to a line once or twice. It was chill in the shadows of the trees, too hot in the field outside. Uncle James chose a spot by the gate where the sunshine was darkened by light shade, and stood there smoking quietly talking to Pat Maguire, who was magnificent on a bright chestnut thoroughbred.

They discussed the race where Mac had failed and yet won, and came from that to Pat's new inheritance.

"You'll come to stay with me sometimes," said Pat grandly, "next year. You see, you've always been a friend."

"Miss Brown dreamt last night," Uncle James smote the pig-eye softly on the neck, "that I found the lost paper."

"If you do, bring it to me," said Pat, with an assumption of lightness, but an undercurrent of gravity. "I'll pay you for it."

Uncle James laughed.

"One cannot find what does not exist," he said

almost sadly. "Now we are going on to Rowane, you say."

It was a three-mile jog along dusty, hard roads to Rowane. The covert stood by a small fir wood, the trees black against the sun. A wall country, easy to cross, lay all around them. Sound grass fields and easy fly fences.

Hounds were scarcely in before they opened . . . fiercely—as if close upon their fox. Despite hot sun and iron ground, the field thrilled to it. "Go-one away!" shrilled from the far end of the gorse; they thundered down, making for the wood which bordered the road. But the hunt was not to be this way, the fox swerving sharply left-handed, back towards the road they had come along. Hounds were hot upon him, and from the scurrying rush in the other direction only three got a start—Dick Doyle, the master himself, and Aunt Jane. She had been upon the road when hounds swept up, had left it by a gate, and suddenly found herself galloping along a grass field, hounds just in front—and nothing but low stone walls to cross. Sweetlass seemed to wake to it. She lengthened her stride and tore on—over a small gap, into another field; Aunt Jane could not stop—the madness of it seemed to change her whole being. She was second with that flying pack. She was for the first time in her life riding a hunt. A poor little three-legged fox racing for his life, with hounds almost snapping at his brush. So fast was it that no one behind could catch up as they flew towards Lusk Wood. Sweetlass faltered in her stride, but was driven on. Norman, galloping on a youngster, caught them and shouted encouragement.

"Well done, Aunt Jane!" Her ears tingled—she even touched her mare with the whip.



And then it was over. They ran into him on the borders of the wood, after a two-mile hunt which had partaken of the nature of a steeplechase.

People chattered and talked ; the inevitable question, Who was there ? and Aunt Jane's heart throbbed with pride. Sweetlass, white foam from head to heel, was cooled in the chill wind, until Tom came to take her.

Every one was glad to have had a last hunt, while Aunt Jane, who had never ridden a gallop in her life, could think of nothing else. But at ten o'clock there came reaction.

"Tom says Miss Jane's mare is lyin' down, an' he's afraid she's sick entirely."

The gallop—the chill—had been too much for the chestnut. She lay panting, apparently injured internally, for she would get up and fling herself down again in violent fits of pain. For hours Miss Jane watched, and then crept to bed—miserable. Morning brought the vet—but no hope. He was afraid the mare would die. He left hurriedly, for there was a fair in the town, and he wanted to be there.

Uncle James had ridden forth to this fair, taking out Greyboy, despite Tom's objections, and returning towards six o'clock to say he had sold the horse . . . the price seemed rather a sore subject.

Through the long, hot March day Aunt Jane had sat with her little mare, each panting breath, each paroxysm of pain, going to her heart. She coaxed the chestnut with mouthfuls of warm bran ; watched with misery. Tom giving her medicine from a drenching bottle.

Below her sorrow her bitter heart was very sore. Wrapped up in their own affairs they seemed to care so little for hers. Her harsh tongue rasped out anger in response to what she thought faint-hearted sympathy.



At last she came from the stable into the chill night, sent away by Tom, who knew the end was near.

"Come, Aunt Jane, it's really no use."

Miss Jane almost flew at her, snapping furiously. "It must be of use—Shelia knew nothing. The mare was quieter and in less pain."

"Yes, she's easier." Shelia forgave the bitter voice, looking down at the chestnut, stretched in the straw. "Easier because she is too weak to stir. Poor little thing!" Shelia, big baby where horses were concerned, shed tears above the dying mare.

They went across the moonlit yard into the black shadows of the trees, the sour little spinster walking silently, but she held her niece's hand.

Fraud as she was, with none of the riches she spoke of, ill-tempered, capricious, clothing deceit in a veil of religion, her heart had gone out to the delicate Sweetlass, had throbbed with keenest joy to her one hunt. And Shelia had wept for her.

Worn out, Aunt Jane went to her room, waiting there. Great happenings were before her. She was about to settle in comfort for the rest of her life, and silenced the twinges of conscience which told her she lied in word and action. It suited her, it seemed to suit Uncle James, to do things swiftly and silently. She snapped bitterly at Maria, whose ready tongue seemed to have no answer to-night, but ministered to her gently, hoping as she left the mare would be grand next day.

Norman and Shelia sat by their own fire, talking unhappily, for the morrow would bring the commencement of Pat's triumph.

Aunt Jane sat, starting at every stir, waiting for news. What if something could be done? She started up.

If the mare might still live! She had seen veterinary books in the library, and looking would at least bring hope. Aunt Jane went swiftly down. The library was still warm, but silent with the strange silence of the night; mice scratched behind the wainscot; the stillness was voiced with faint rustlings. Candle in hand, Aunt Jane searched. The modern book she had seen was not there, for Shelia had herself taken it away to search in; but as the little woman pried and peered, she spied a heavy volume of the old "Book of the Farm," and took it eagerly down. There were many chapters devoted to horses; it seemed to her as she read that she would never find out anything; blundering from disease to disease, hoping that she might light upon some cure, find something to ease pain. The little head with its suffering eyes, its panting breath, was ever with her. In cold array she read of curbs, spavins, fevered feet, strained tendons, of bleedings, of drugs, now all forgotten. Then, dipping into severer ailments, read eagerly, for here were words of hurried breath, of refusal to eat—and she might find her cure. As she would have turned over she found two pages stuck together, as if gummed, and taking up a paper knife she cut sharply. Then the suffering mare was, for a space, forgotten. For folded flatly between the leaves was a paper, dated many years before, signed, witnessed . . . bearing, as she looked, upon the Dunmore estate. "That the said Francis Maguire . . ." etc. Miss Jane sat very still. . . . Beyond the pale arc of the candle-light was a sea of shadow; in its midst she seemed to see an old man sitting at a table—smiling happily.

Without fear, telling herself it was fancy . . . then it passed . . . there was only the empty shadowy

room ; the pale spear of candle flame ; the dull red of the dying embers in the grate.

"The gum bottle was overturned." Miss Jane remembered Shelia's telling of the story. The old man had no doubt been looking through the paper—had slipped it into the farm book for safety as he did something else ; then came the sudden, flurried horror of death ; the numbed fingers ; the inability to move ; his brain troubled by the paper he had put away.

"Am dying—shake——" He was given time to write no more, but passed—the despatch box shut by his side ; the spilt gum must have trickled to the book, sticking some of its leaves. In the hurry it was put away, not to be opened again, and though each book had been searched, no one had thought of the paper not coming out when the books were opened.

Aunt Jane got up, holding the deed.

Heavy feet tramping in, going up the stairs. She darted out. Tom's kindly face peered at her—he pulled nervously at his shaven chin.

"The craythur's gone, ma'am . . . peaceful at the last." Tom put his hand to his eyes, and Miss Jane, turning away, sobbed very bitterly. Soured, lonely, ill-tempered—she had loved her mare.

"Thank you, Tom. You did your best for her." She went slowly upstairs, to meet a plump little figure in a dressing-gown several sizes too long for him—it was borrowed from Norman. Uncle James took her cold hand, he sympathized softly, he offered hot whisky and water. But he forgot everything when Miss Jane, telling her story, held up the paper.

Mr. James Rivers eyed it stonily. This would make Shelia rich again ; reduce Pat Maguire to a mere squireen ; one heavily in debt. Norman might prove

to be annoyed when that nebulous, promised cheque was not forthcoming. But Pat, what would Pat give for that folded, flattened deed? Golden heaps of wealth . . . crisp bank-notes; ringing sovereigns . . . and no man wiser.

In the stillness of the night Uncle James found eloquence. He whispered of a wrong done to Pat's father; of his moral right to these moneys; he applied religion in flaming spots; he suggested Shelia's comparative riches—his speech cunning as a serpent, his plump hands weaving webs of persuasion.

"Give it to me, Jane," said Uncle James softly.

The thin woman looked hard at the deed. She had no love for any one in the household; the sum which Uncle James said should be her own tempted her sorely. They had often laughed at her, flouted her religious views. But no woman likes to spring at wrong. She must first temporize, allowing herself to be persuaded that it is right.

"I'll bring it down in the morning," she said, and went away.

Uncle James slept lightly; kindly thoughts brightening his wakeful moments. Many times in his life he had been in tight places and escaped; it seemed as if he was about to do so again.

The night paled to a dull morning; heavy mists across the chill world. Grass silver wet and trees dripping ere the sun came to kiss their tears away. Maria, reft from happy sleep by an alarm clock, came stamping with tea in the dimness; the air was rawly bitter, freezing fingers to numbness, noses to chilly purple.

Aunt Jane and Uncle James were going in on business by the earliest train, taking each a bag.

Uncle James called up the stairs; he was ready first.

Aunt Jane came from her room, a long envelope in her hand ; seeing it, he turned to get into his coat. But Jane paused at the window, looking out. There were the fields she had exercised dead Sweetlass in ; there, far away, was the wood she had ridden her hunt from ; the thrill of it touched her now. And Shelia had cried last night for the little suffering mare.

Aunt Jane knew she lived a lie, that unpleasantness must follow, and that the deed given to Pat must brighten and smooth everything for her.

But Shelia loved horses, loved hunting, had cried last night for a dying screw. Aunt Jane set her teeth. Help her as it might, the specious arguings were wrong, and she would do right.

She snapped sharply at Maria. " Give this to Mrs. Rivers with the other letters," she said, and went down into the fog.

Shelia was late that morning ; she drew a peevish hand against the fog-dimmed window pane, sighing wearily.

" It will not lift to-day, Boy. Does it mean it will never lift again for us ? "

Norman put his head on her shoulder.

" Poverty, Boy. It will be that for you and me—for we have had so much—the old people must go away, the land be let for grazing ; the horses will be things of commerce, kept to live upon."

" Buck up, old girl," was what Norman said, but he said it very tenderly. " See, the fog's going."

Gold-looming came a distant sun, a haze-dimmed circlet . . . lost, then here again, and then rolling back the fog lifted, leaving its trail of silver wet, its clear dewdrops on bough and leaf, but, sweeping upwards, killed by a fiery kiss.



Shelia sighed softly.

"I wonder," she said, "why those two relatives who in some future time are to make us rich, have chosen to fly to Cahervally by an early train? I wonder too"—she looked at Norman—"whether they will ever leave us anything?"

"Or if they've anything to leave?" said Norman cheerfully.

"Think of how we've battled all this winter with temper and with greed. How Maria . . . only remains for the postman's sake." Shelia laughed suddenly. "Come, we have many things before us; come to breakfast."

Cheery sunshine poured into the red-papered dining-room, touching the silver to flashing brightness, warring with a blazing fire.

Maria associated letters with the tardy arrival of her lover; she brought in the post, with the two letters addressed severally to Norman and Shelia. They took them up languidly. Mac was soon deep in a letter from England. He cried out suddenly. "I knew I was right," he said. "Your Uncle James tried to play me a trick or two, and I hope you'll forgive me, Norman. I wrote to a ferrety friend of mine in London to find out what he could for me. I doubted the reality of those ever-coming riches. Well, it so chances that he knows all about him. Your Uncle James Rivers has got an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and not another penny in the world. As to leaving any money, he has none to leave—he simply came over here to live comfortably for nothing."

"Overheard us in Guernsey, and laid his plans accordingly," said Norman. "The—old—schemer. He owes money, I believe, at every shop I've credit with



... he sold the grey horse without ever having paid for him."

"That at least is something . . . for Pat Maguire," said Mac drily. "And now, I suppose, he's just walked off."

Shelia looked vacantly at Aunt Jane's letter, listening with a watery smile.

"It's merely part of the cloud of misfortune," she said. "I'm afraid I was pleased at the idea of Desmond being eventually rich—but as it is—— Let me see why Aunt Jane has written to me."

Norman opened the flap of his uncle's letter with the expression of a man who wishes the writer's head was beneath his tearing fingers.

"Aunt Jane!" Shelia cried out. "She—they—she too. No, I won't have hot tea poured down my back. Mac, I am not hysterical. Aunt Jane's just the same. She has a small annuity. She heard too. She writes to say she never had any mines, but just came here as a fraud, and she hopes I'll forgive her, for she's gone away this morning to be married before the registrar to Mr. James Rivers."

"Both afraid the other would find out if they took things in the ordinary way, so they arranged to run away," cried Mac.

Shelia lifted the long envelope. She read on, wild-eyed now, babbling, holding out the paper to Norman, scarcely understanding what she did.

Misfortune, cross-eyed jade, began to arrange her outdoor cloak and look at the front door. If Aunt Jane had come there under false pretences, she had atoned in full.

"Mr. Maguire, ma'am, an' a man with him is comin' up the avenue," announced Maria bitterly.

Norman read the paper hurriedly, but carefully. It was, so far as he could see, the missing deed transferring the estates to Shelia's father, making full provision for the erring elder son, who had disgraced his family by marrying Mary Cassidy.

"Ask Mr. Maguire to hurry," said Norman. "We want to see him now. Send the motor for Mr. Butler, Maria. Fly! Tell Carty to break every speed limit he knows."

Maria knew something joyful was astir. White cap-strings flying, she sped to the yard, delivering the message to a youth, who in turn delivered to Carty the somewhat changed version that the "masther said he was to knock sparks from the roads, and bedam to the polis"—words followed by the speedy parting of Carty in a halo of petrol-scented dust.

It was at this moment that Uncle James, coming out of the registrar's office with his bride upon his arm, asked her for the deed, and she told him where it now was. Also, five minutes later, as one who wishes to face the worst at once, that her mines were fictitious.

Uncle James' wedding-breakfast lacked flavour. He had, in fact, so much to say that commencement was impossible. The vista of a cramped lodging with an elderly wife did not appeal to him—but already he schemed and hoped.

"I shall say I have lost everything, expose Jane's perfidy, and appeal to Norman," thought Uncle James, directing the bill of their breakfast to be charged to Mrs. Rivers.

Pat Maguire waited for some time in the library at Dunmore, waited wondering what could have occurred, until the throb, throb of a car announced Butler's somewhat speed-shattered arrival.

"We have killed a pig, if not an old woman—the latter of fright," he announced indignantly. "But what is it, Shelia, child?"

Wet-eyed, breaking down as she never had before her trouble, she held him out the deed.

Then they went to the library.

When Pat Maguire had ceased blustering, and sat head in hands, realizing the pile of debts he had built about him—the horses, carriages, rent, household goods unpaid for—it was Shelia, the cousin he had had no mercy on, who gently offered to lend him what money he required to pay these debts with.

Pat stared at her drearily. He had flown and fallen. Back now to the little house on the hill, back to job with four-year-olds and unsound horses; to poach rabbits and pheasants, eat boiled bacon and cabbage, and live again with Timsy Hassett and the friends he had left. To marry buxom Kattie Hassett, whose roses had faded during his prosperity.

Bitter, unavoidable medicine to one who had used his hopes to broider a flag woven of boasting and vainglory, waved in the world's eyes. Yet there was good blood as well as bad in the man; he was very close to the race he had tried to join when he said good-bye to them.

"You've offered me what I never deserved," said Pat simply, but with trembling lip. "I took you wrong, and you've taken me right, and—if you would Shelia . . ."

She laid a slim hand in his. Poacher, blusterer, horse-coper as he was, he had found a friend who meant to help him.

Down the avenue in his showy suit, back to tell his mother and sisters. Misfortune, shutting the front door at Dunmore with a bang, walked with him.

Shelia shot out among the daffodils and anemones—gold and scarlet and lemon and pink they flamed and glowed above the earth, reminding her of the day so long ago when Norman had come to say good-bye to her.

Already they talked of next year, of the horses with which they would replace the cripples, of a trip to be taken, of all they would do. Mac, sharing their joy, carried them off to Castle Granagh, where hammers tapped, saws whined, and chaos and ladders ruled unchecked.

Here flower-beds gaped blackly, waiting for Nancy to fill them. Back again, Nancy was coming to tea—it was hard to be still—to Dunmore, to find joy had driven every man to do his neighbour's work, and Mickey, divided between burnishing bits and cleaning the motor, let his tongue hold high revel.

"Aunt Jane and Uncle James—running away with each other for their money," said Shelia at tea-time. She had already sent little Sweetlass' hoofs to be made up and inscribed for Aunt Jane.

"Yet if they'd never come, Pat would have chosen his pictures and silver, and we should have been sitting here in despair," said Norman.

"Running away with each other for the money neither possessed," mused Shelia. "Poor Aunt Jane and Uncle James."

"Serve them both right," said Mac tersely.

THE END







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